

MARTIN AMIS ON TRUMP'S BABBLINGS
ART SPIEGELMAN ON THE GHOSTS OF WAR

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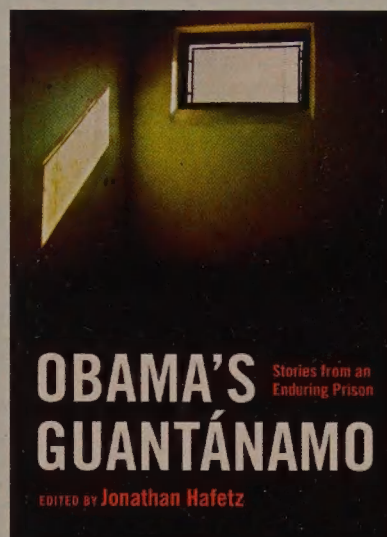
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THE ORIGINS OF SPEECH

IN THE BEGINNING WAS CHOMSKY

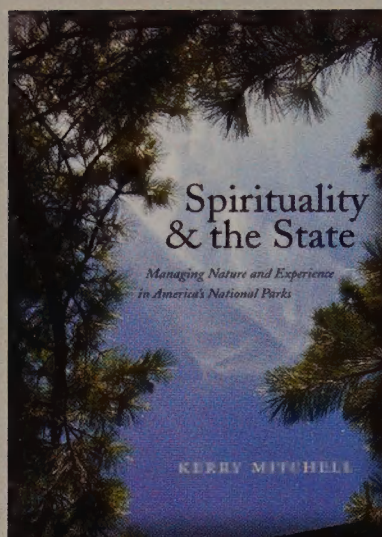
BY TOM WOLFE

TIMELY AND RELEVANT

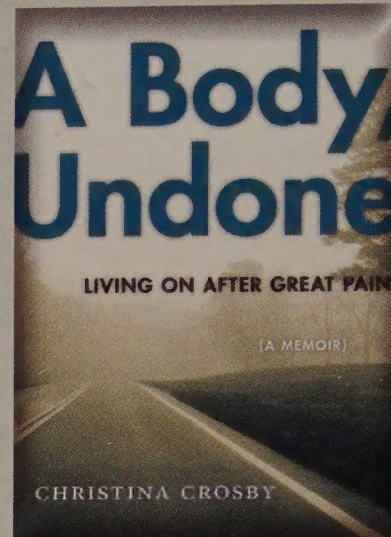


"An alarming and important indictment of Obama's ineffectual approach to one of his signature campaign issues and of America's tarnished system of justice as a whole."

—Kirkus Reviews

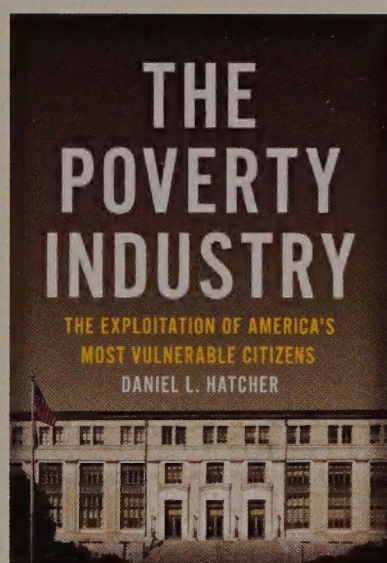


Analyzes the ways in which the state manages spirituality in National Parks through subtle, sophisticated, unspoken, and powerful techniques, allowing for deep, spiritual, connections between visitors and the space.



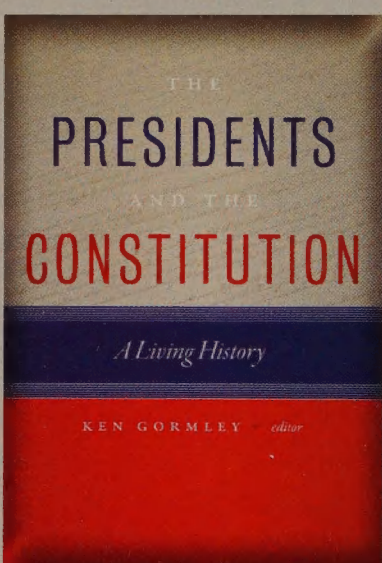
"Part grueling diary of living with chronic pain and part celebration of survival, this is a complicated understanding of what it means to change your definition of living while living through it."

—Elle



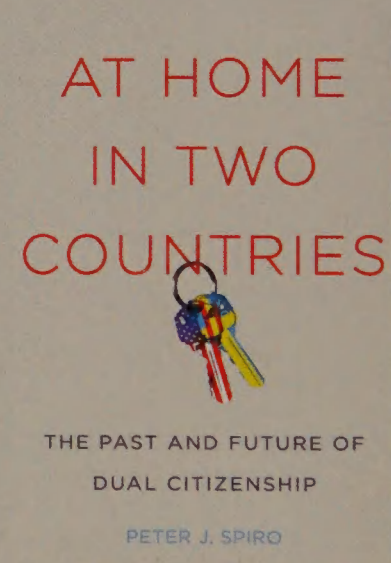
"The *Poverty Industry* breaks fresh ground. Every American who cares about the intersection of private profits and public justice should read this book, and wrestle with its arguments."

—Sarah Stillman, staff writer for the *New Yorker*



"Everything you ever wanted to know about the Supreme Court and the Presidency but were afraid to ask."

—Nina Totenberg, correspondent for NPR



"Peter Spiro's erudite and crisply written book on dual citizenship will help any reader better understand business and life generally in the global economy... It will provoke important debate."

—Paul M. Barrett, *Bloomberg Businessweek*



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LETTERS

Viral Content

Considering requests for compassionate use of experimental drugs remains one of the hardest, most complex tasks that any health-care company faces, as Helen Ouyang writes ["Hashtag Prescription," Essay, June]. Patients make these requests when they are at their most vulnerable—when they have not responded to available treatments or are not eligible for clinical trials. In an effort to create a fair and transparent process for evaluating compassionate-use requests, Janssen/Johnson & Johnson launched an innovative collaboration with the Division of Medical Ethics at the NYU School of Medicine, which has been at the forefront of the conversation about compassionate use. Together, we set up an advisory committee of internationally recognized medical experts, bioethicists, and, most important, patient representatives. This panel of independent external advisers ensures that each patient's request is evaluated

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according to objective criteria and high ethical standards.

Amrit Ray

Chief Medical Officer, Janssen
Titusville, N.J.

Arthur Caplan

Director, Division of Medical Ethics
NYU School of Medicine
New York City

With the help of our compassionate-use campaign, Josh Hardy received an experimental drug that saved his life, but the episode also motivated me and other patient advocates—along with Congress, the Food and Drug Administration, health-care providers, and ethicists—to reexamine the process through which experimental drugs are given to terminally ill patients.

Desperate parents will pursue any means to save the lives of their children. The publicity surrounding the success of the Josh Hardy campaign gave these parents what I would characterize as false hope—since there is no guarantee that experimental drugs will work and typically no data available on their historical success rates in children with cancer. Children who take these drugs may experience severe and painful side effects that one pediatric oncologist has described as "torture."

So what's the solution? We must work with the FDA and drug companies to accelerate the pace of clinical trials for children. Currently, trials for children with cancer lag many years behind those for adults, even though there's often no scientific or medical reason to bar children from participating. If the FDA and its industry partners worked as hard to improve the clinical pathway as they are currently working to streamline the compassionate-use process, sick children and their families would be much better off.

Richard L. Plotkin
Cofounder and Vice Chairman, Max
Cure Foundation
Englewood Cliffs, N.J.

Trading Up

Paul Wood seems to believe that Donald Trump's supporters are exclusively bitter, xenophobic, under-educated carnival workers ["Trump's People," Report, June]. If he shifted his focus from Trump's bad taste—a reality, but a trifling one—to Trump's proposed policies, he might come to a different conclusion.

For a generation, left-leaning Americans like me have been betrayed by a stream of politicians claiming to act in our name. One example offers an interesting window on Trump's appeal. In 1999 the Clinton Administration brokered a landmark deal that led to China becoming a permanent member of the World Trade Organization, despite widespread international con-

cern about the country's atrocious record of human-rights abuses. The deal came as no great surprise to those of us who paid attention to the campaign-finance controversy of 1996, in which China had been strongly implicated in an attempt to influence U.S. foreign policy.

More than 50,000 U.S. factories have closed and millions of jobs have moved overseas in the years since the agreement was reached. Our trade deficit has soared, and the erosion of the manufacturing sector has been the principal driver of the disappearance of the middle class. All of this thanks to the supposedly liberal policies of the Clinton Administration.

We finally have a candidate willing to speak out against these trade deals, one who—for all his nouveau riche gaucheness—does not seem so easily bought by foreign interests. Please do forgive me if I overlook Trump's bad hair and moments of boorish populism; I'm more concerned with human dignity, the well-being of my countrymen, and the imperiled world we inhabit.

Michael Boisson
Marfa, Tex.

Correction

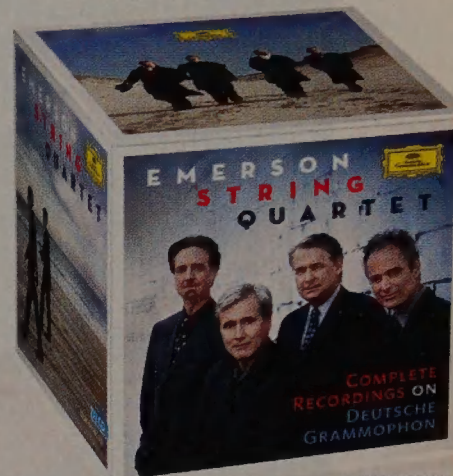
Because of an editing error, the caption for Findings [June] misstated the location of the museum where Yun-Fei Ji's *Blind Stream* was on view. The Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art is located at Hamilton College, in Clinton, N.Y., not in Hamilton, N.Y. We regret the error.

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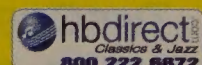
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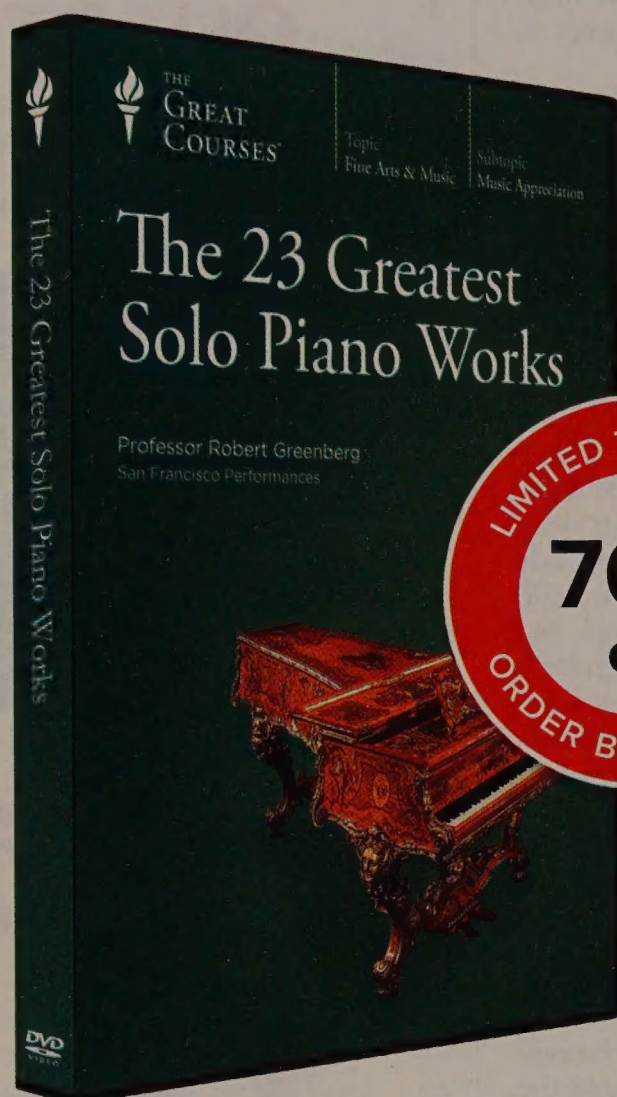


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EASY CHAIR

Atlas Aggregated
By Walter Kirn

No social encounter delights me more than meeting a doctor at a cocktail party. In clinical settings, doctors tend to be guarded and aloof. Catch one with a whiskey in hand, though, and you might find yourself in possession of all sorts of inside information. Among the nuggets I've gathered in this fashion are: that salt and butter aren't really bad for you; that nicotine is a marvelous antidepressant; that vegans are no healthier than the rest of us; and that early cancer screening may be pointless, since many small tumors vanish on their own and some grow so slowly that their human hosts will die before they do major harm. Some of this may be inaccurate, perhaps, but most of it is worth repeating at other parties.

Last May, at a party in Las Vegas, I found myself chatting with a surgeon, the type of doctor I most idolize. Along with fighter pilots, surgeons represent to me the pinnacle of courage, self-mastery, and independence. They are the elite of the elite. This one, however, whom I'll call Dr. Dave, felt deeply disgruntled and unappreciated. He assured me that these feelings were common in his field—he had been a head and neck surgeon who specialized in facial reconstructions—and were part of the reason he'd retired early. Dressed in the kind of loud Hawai-

ian shirt often favored by men who've flipped off the system, he blamed his foreshortened career on what he termed, with patent distaste, "consumer-driven medicine."

The situation, he said, was this. About a decade ago, hospitals began distributing patient-satisfaction questionnaires designed by the Department of Health and Human Services. In 2010, the Affordable Care Act linked Medicare reimbursements to a set of quality-of-care measurements that included patient-satisfaction scores. A few years before, Dr. Dave had left private practice in part because insurers were paying solo doctors less than big hospitals. At the hospital, he felt pressure from administrators to keep his scores up. This meant catering to his patients' whims, and sometimes to their neuroses and addictions. As "a slave to opinion," he found himself ordering unnecessary tests to head off complaints from anxious, demanding types. He continued to treat people after they were well. He also grew reluctant to give advice that, though medically sound, might cause offense. Once, when he urged a patient to lose weight, Dr. Dave was accused of calling him fat. Then there were the patients whose aches and pains he diagnosed as symptoms of depression. They sometimes took umbrage, driving down his grades.

Dr. Dave went as far as blaming our prescription-opioid epidemic on the questionnaires, which sounded like the kind of cocktail-party medical chatter whose reliability seems questionable in the sober light of day, until later research showed that many experts agreed with him, including one doctor who linked the scourge, in an article for the *Boston Globe*, to the "era of patient-satisfaction surveys." To Dr. Dave, though, there was a larger issue: the creeping usurpation of his authority by people who hadn't a clue about his craft, let alone the workings of their own insides. Here he was, a highly skilled practitioner who'd once replaced a child's missing ear by growing tissue on the child's own head and then delicately harvesting and shaping it, being critiqued by laymen, by amateurs, whose only qualification to judge his work was having ears. It was crazy. It was upside down. In the name of empowering the patient, the physician had been diminished, deposed, degraded.

"When you go to a Starbucks, you're pretty sure whether you got a good cup of coffee," said Dr. Dave. "But if you have your appendix taken out, you only know what kind of job they did by whether the scar is pretty." He took a sip of his drink and shook his head as if to wish his old profession good riddance. His Hawaiian shirt blazed with annoyance. I felt

for him. Thirty-five years of training and experience thwarted by our belief that the customer is always right, even if the customer is stupid or addicted to prescription narcotics.

My sympathy for Dr. Dave turned into something more immediate the other day, when a notification appeared on my desktop, from where I'm not quite sure. My wife, I think. As an active Twitter user, she's often the first in our household to hear the bells toll. Sometimes, as in this case, they toll for me. "Introducing Book Marks," the announcement read, "Lit Hub's 'Rotten Tomatoes' for Books":

Book Marks will showcase critics from the most important and active outlets of literary journalism in America, aggregating reviews from over seventy sources—newspapers, magazines, and websites—and averaging them into a letter grade.

As a novelist and book critic myself, I found this exuberant proclamation jarring, partly because of its stilted rhythms, which didn't instill much faith in the ability of Lit Hub's staff to showcase, aggregate, and average the critical prose of anyone—if such tasks even required thought rather than brute digital force. I also detested the publication's name, which reminded me of GrubHub, the site that delivers meals to your front door. "Lit" rankled, too. So breezy and diminishing, like calling San Francisco "Frisco." And letter grades? Those are for book reports, not books. How would they be generated, anyway? Through what process of distillation and dehydration could reviews of varying lengths and styles, some of them rich in wit, presumably, and shimmering with connotative subtlety, be turned into little easy-to-swallow pills?

In a tone of cheerful full disclosure apparently intended to disarm skeptics, Lit Hub offered a so-called grading rubric. It fascinated me, with its odd, futuristic sensibility of silicon humanism.

A

(10/9.5/9) TOTALLY POSITIVE

Compelling content · Does some-

thing new/profound with form · Reviewer enthuses

B

(8.5/8/7.5) MOSTLY POSITIVE

Compelling content and competent form, or visa versa · Flawed in a way that brings the book down but doesn't destroy it

You get the picture.

The rubric, I sensed, was the work of committee; it had that aggregated, averaged ring. It was also, to my mind, utter nonsense. Years ago, when I wrote a regular book column for *New York* magazine, I often found it hard to characterize my own reviews. My raves had tricky undertows, my pans had silver linings, and the mixed reviews, which outnumbered the others, skittered all over the place, pure monkey mind. Book reviewing, as I conceived of it and strove to practice it, was chiefly descriptive, not evaluative, and what it described was not the book itself but my encounter with the book. It tried to make manifest the act of reading in something like the way that travel writing dramatizes journeys. It wasn't scorekeeping. It wasn't grading. It didn't break down into 8's and 8.5's.

When my mother, God rest her soul, was nearing forty, a spell of religious fervor overtook her. It came without warning, like a tick-borne illness. She hunkered down in our den with a strange volume that purported to unlock the secrets of ancient prophecy by assigning numerical values to Hebrew letters. Her mania scared me and didn't last long, luckily, but her eyes shone wildly while it did. The notion that language can be converted into math and math into meaning is pure hermetic madness, the alchemical essence of delusion. But at Lit Hub, it's policy. It's principle. The site has many worthy features, from author interviews to essays, but the grading business undermines it all. Works of literature are among the most intricate and elusive of human artifacts, the crudest of which requires more creativity than twenty trillion acts of aggregation. A site created to celebrate them now aimed to reduce them to an alphabetic omega point.

Ezra Pound defined literature as "news that stays news." I'd offer a less elegant definition. It's complexity that stays complex. In engineering terms, it's holistic and synergistic. In human terms, it's heroic, like surgery. It's a feat of stupendous risk and difficulty that, because it so often comes to nothing after taking one's all, can only be made worthwhile by the prospect of glory and prestige. But this is not the era of prestige. This is the day of the letter-grading locust.

If this all sounds a bit elitist, it might be worth asking who actually benefits from digital populism. Does it really help readers to take the complexity of the reading experience and reduce it to a number, complete with decimal point? Probably not, but it will certainly help Amazon, and anyone else who seeks to make a profit, by treating books as essentially fungible and squeezing the writers, editors, and publishers who make them. After all, if my publisher refuses to make my latest novel available on Kindle at a steep discount, there's no need to buy it at price from your local independent; just find another 8.5—God willing—to download for a dollar.

Similarly, the primary beneficiaries of Dr. Dave's patient-satisfaction surveys are not patients but insurers—both government insurers and the private insurance companies that follow Medicare's lead in setting rates. Low ratings allow them to save money by cutting their payments to providers, creating the pressure that had pushed him into retirement.

In our age of incessant disruption from below, with elites being toppled on every side—in journalism, in commerce, in politics, and now in medicine, it seems—the battle cry is "Power to the people," but the spoils have a way of flowing to the middlemen. Thus, the great political populist of our time, the man who promises to save us from all the corrupt politicians who have sold our country to corporate interests, is just another billionaire businessman, a man whose chief qualification seems to be that he lacks the technocrat's competence and expertise.

Not long after my chat with Dr. Dave, which, along with the rise of Donald Trump, had put me in an antipopulist mood, I took a stab at rereading Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*, a lousy novel whose theme is excellence. The first time I read it, in 1980, I was about to turn eighteen. The Space Age had wound down quite a bit by then, the roaring Apollo launches of my boyhood devolving into the Apollo-Soyuz joint production with the Soviets. There wasn't a war on, nor did one seem likely. History was in a lull. But I was maniacally excited. I'd been admitted to Princeton a few months earlier and very soon I'd fly there from Minnesota. I knew not to brag about this in my small town, but inside my head I was soaring. Here I come, world! To open *The Fountainhead* in such a state was like touching a blowtorch to a haystack. Later, I couldn't recall a single line, only the conflagration in my ego.

When I reread the novel, my brain was cooler. I'd been thinking about elitism. I missed it. I missed a world that had a top and a bottom, that wasn't just a networked, horizontal, spreading expanse of averaged cultural mulch. Even the titans of industry seemed dull, especially Zuckerberg and Bezos, whose faces had a weird, undeveloped aspect that seemed to belong to a new, transitional species, no longer *Homo sapiens*, not yet E.T. They were geniuses, supposedly, but somehow they failed to stir the soul. There was nothing defiant about them—maybe that was it. To me, elitism meant battling the odds with nothing but a scalpel or a pen, not brainstorming with your team to fashion systems for pleasing everybody all the time.

Howard Roark, *The Fountainhead*'s rebel architect, believes in pleasing no one but himself. He is practically unemployable. A terror. He's also a rapist, but a winning one, with an indomitable sense of destiny that bores through female flesh and solid rock. He's basically a chiseled spermatozoon with tense biceps and a high I.Q. He represents the opposite of something that Rand despises but never succinctly defines, despite about seven thousand tries—plasticity, mediocrity, collectivism. He resembles no one now alive except perhaps, at moments, Kanye

West, but minus the raging thirst for adulation. Anonymity suits him as much as fame, and he withdraws to a quarry for a spell of sweaty, contented labor. As a role model for a revived elitism, he's perfectly useless and without appeal, a stoic lunatic porn-star intellectual, more fantastic than Tarzan but less relatable. Forget my rant about novels and letter grades. *The Fountainhead* gets an F.

Still, the elites, or whatever remains of them—those rare and lonesome worthies of skill and courage—deserve some protection from us, the aggregate. Prestige, irreducible and absolute, has its uses, and the very highest is inducing people to do hard things, things that take a lot of time to learn and exceptional nerve to execute, like building a child a new ear and reattaching it in such a way that blood flows through it and it doesn't die. Should a person who's managed to do this even once have to duck Rotten Tomatoes from the cheap seats? The meek will inherit the earth (the wealthy, Mars), but until then we'll still need heroes. Let's honor them, not average them. ■

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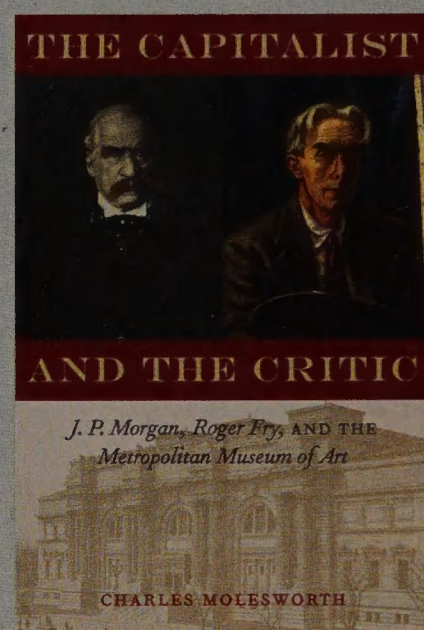
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The Capitalist and the Critic

J. P. Morgan,
Roger Fry, and
the Metropolitan
Museum of Art

BY CHARLES
MOLESWORTH



*A fascinating retelling
of the often testy
relationship between J.
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Fry, two men who did
more to establish the
preeminence of the
Metropolitan Museum
of Art than any
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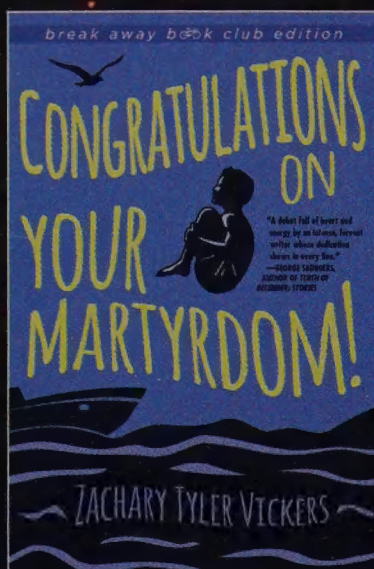
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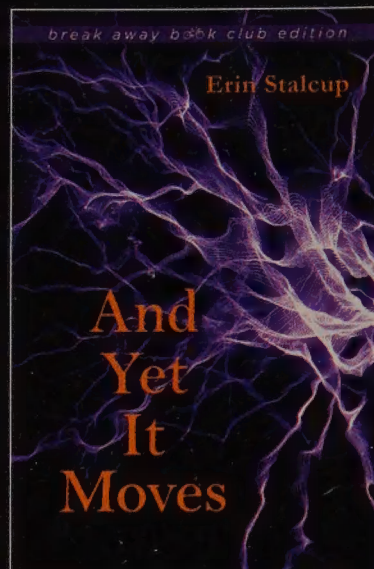


"A debut full of heart and energy, by an intense, fervent writer whose dedication shows in every line."

—George Saunders

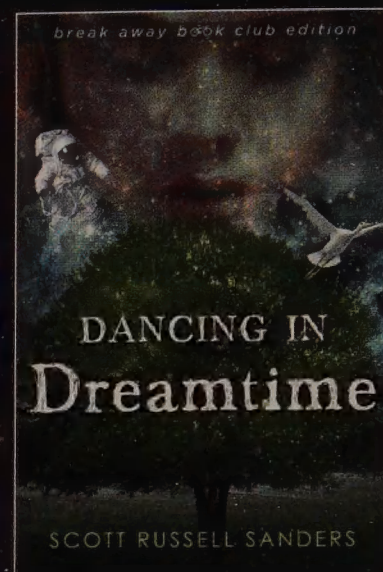


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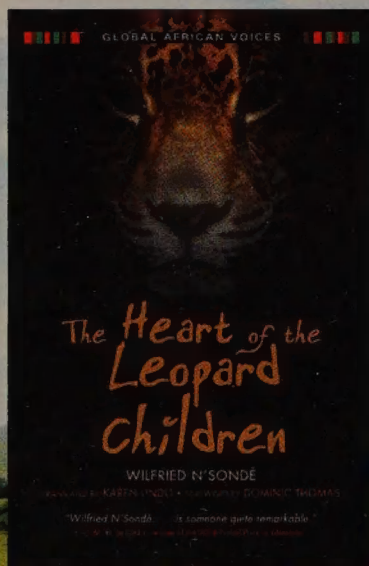


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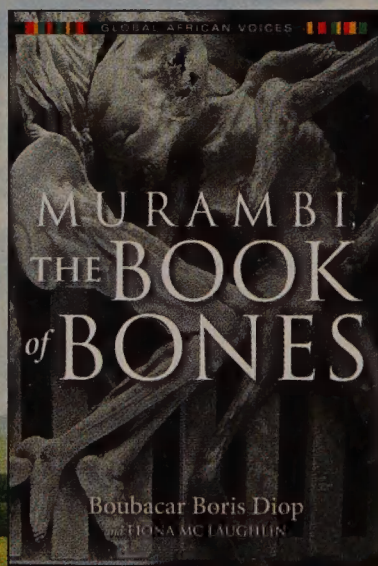
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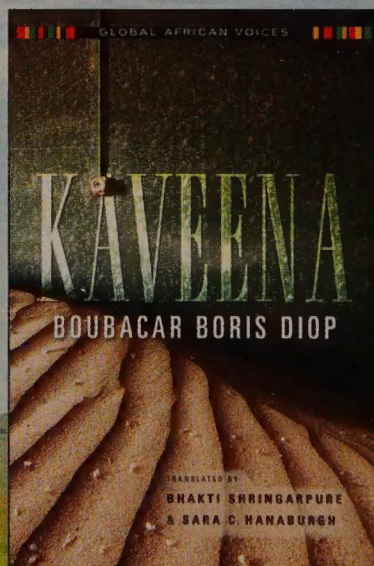
"N'Sondé... is someone quite remarkable."

—J. M. G. Le Clézio,
winner of the 2008
Nobel Prize in
Literature



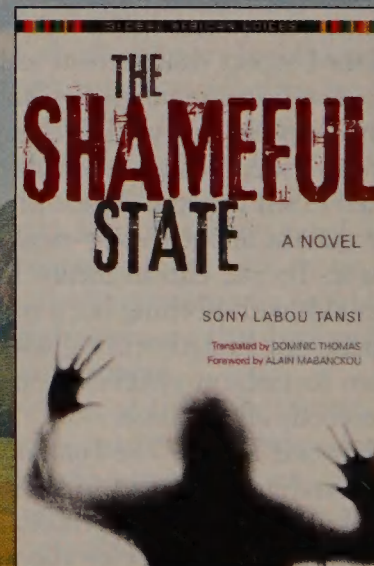
"This novel is a miracle... it verifies my conviction that art alone can handle the consequences of human destruction and translate these consequences into meaning."

—Toni Morrison



"... Always opinionated, always passionate, and always worth reading."

—The Lit Hub



"Showcases Tansi's incredible talent and his position, even in death, as one of Africa's important voices."

—Publishers Weekly



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Figures cited are the latest available as of June 2016. Sources are listed on page 94.

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READINGS

[Essay]

THE NEW NEW NARCISSISM

By Kristin Dombek, from *The Selfishness of Others*, a monograph that was published this month by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Dombek is the recipient of a 2013 Rona Jaffe award.

We know the new selfishness when we see it. It's in the laughter of the Atlanta girl who, on the reality show *My Super Sweet 16*, demanded that the city's busiest avenue be shut down for her arrival. It's in her answer to the party planner when he pointed out the traffic—"My sweet sixteen is more important than wherever they have to be"—and in her shrug when he mentioned the hospital across the street: "They can wait one second. Or they can just go around."

Here is the shamelessly self-absorbed millennial, indifferent to the sick and the dying, indifferent to us. Allison turned sixteen, on television, in 2007. Two years later, she became exhibit A in *The Narcissism Epidemic*, by Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, who used the episode to diagnose her with an "almost sociopathic narcissism." Allison was typical, they argued, of the generation now poised to rule the world—a.k.a. Generation Me. She was evidence for a claim that, in the years since the book appeared, has itself become epidemic: that narcissism is the best name for what's wrong with people these days—and millennials most of all.

According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which introduced the category of narcissistic personality disorder (N.P.D.) in 1980, "behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture" is a crucial criterion for distinguishing personality disorders from anxiety, depression, and other mental afflictions. Those conditions are things you have; they may come and go. A personality disorder is something you are. Those with N.P.D. are markedly grandiose and lacking in empathy, their idealization of themselves and others playing in endless rotation with injured withdrawal, coldness, and cruelty. When the American Psychiatric Association introduced the term, it claimed that less than 1 percent of the population suffered from the condition; in the most recent revision, the *DSM-V* puts the statistic, confusingly, at 0 to 6.2 percent, a range that reflects some variance, to say the least, in the methods by which psychologists define and measure this disorder.

To have a disorder of the personality is, by definition, to be an outsider in one's own life and a stranger to one's culture. But many psychologists, journalists, and bloggers have argued, over the past ten years, that a term once used to describe those who could not fit in or deal with the rest of us is increasingly the best label for most of us—that N.P.D. no longer defines marked differences from our culture, but describes our culture exactly.

This isn't the first moment in history that has been called exceptional in its selfishness, or the first time a new generation has been called narcissistic.

Bouchra Khalili: The Mapping Journey Project Through Oct 10

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Installation view of Bouchra Khalili:
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Museum of Modern Art, New York.
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The Museum of Modern Art, New
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As long ago as 1976, Tom Wolfe's article "The Me Decade" announced from the cover of *New York* that a self-centered falseness of frightening proportions had taken over the culture. Three years later, Christopher Lasch's book *The Culture of Narcissism* hit the bestseller lists. These days, for every article lamenting millennials' special narcissism, another points out that the tendency is nothing new. Unlike Wolfe and Lasch, however, the current prophets claim to have the data to prove it.

If such proof is possible, it is thanks to an innovation that dates from the same year that Lasch's book appeared, when two social psychologists, Robert Raskin and Calvin Hall, developed a survey that measured traits of N.P.D. in "normal" and "healthy" people: the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. The survey presents the subject with forty pairs of statements that are equally socially acceptable—"I am assertive" and "I wish I were more assertive," for example. Whether or not you agree with either, you must choose one. (This type of measure is called, appropriately, a forced-choice survey.) Certain

pairings ferret out maladaptive facets of narcissism, such as vanity. ("I don't particularly like to show off my body." "I like to show off my body.") There are also claims such as "I like to take responsibility for making decisions," which, if you agree with it, pushes your score in the narcissistic direction, but is not necessarily an anti-social trait. Raskin and Hall assume that there is no single point on the spectrum at which one becomes a full-blown narcissist. Even a score of 40 does not qualify a person as having N.P.D.; the survey is supposed to measure "subclinical" narcissism, a subtlety that is often missing when N.P.I. results are reported in the media and the self-help blogosphere, where the pathological and the normal blur into one.

Psychologists have repeatedly administered the test to college students. Twenge's innovation was to collect studies in which N.P.I. scores were tallied, average the scores across all available campuses for each year, and then track these scores for the years since the survey began. She and her collaborators analyzed studies representing 16,475 surveys, and found that N.P.I. scores had indeed risen between 1979 and 2006, an increase that was widely reported as 30 percent.

You've probably read about it: when Twenge and Campbell's initial paper came out in 2007, it was immediately covered by the major news networks and newspapers; in the years since, that study and Twenge's subsequent work have been rehearsed in every new cover story about millennial narcissism, as well as across the sizeable portion of the internet that is dedicated to psychological self-help, where the references to hard data lend an apocalyptic urgency to advice about defending against the cruel self-absorption of your daughter, your best friend, your boyfriend. But the coverage seldom spends much time on the considerable disagreement in the field of social psychology over what the N.P.I. actually measures, and whether the math truly represents a significant increase. Working with the same data set (but adding more campuses), another group of psychologists, led by Kali H. Trzesniewski, argued that scores on the N.P.I. were *not* substantially rising. Even if Twenge and Campbell had the math right, their language was misleading. The claim that two thirds of college students scored 30 percent higher than the N.P.I. scale's original sample average means not that narcissism has increased by 30 percent but that a slight majority of students in 2006 answered, on average, one or two more questions indicating narcissism than did in 1986, when the sample average was first determined. It's easy to miss the fact that the N.P.I. measures "normal" and "healthy" narcissism, and that other research has demonstrated that the rise in scores has been in traits that are "adaptive," rather than "maladaptive." Twenge herself has ad-

[Assessment]

TEST PERP

From a questionnaire created by Northpointe, a company that develops software to determine the likelihood that a defendant in a criminal trial will break the law in the future. The questionnaire asks the respondent to rate statements on a scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." In May, an analysis by ProPublica found that the Northpointe algorithm's accuracy rate for predicting violent crimes was 20 percent. African-American defendants were wrongly labeled future criminals at twice the rate of white defendants.

I feel unhappy at times.
 I feel discouraged at times.
 I have never felt sad about things in my life.
 I have never intensely disliked anyone.
 I always practice what I preach.
 I have played sick to get out of something.
 I have gotten involved in things I later wished I could have gotten out of.
 If someone insults my friends, family, or group, they are asking for trouble.
 I have felt very angry at someone or something.
 The law doesn't help average people.



Sanctuary, a painting by Jules de Balincourt, whose work was on view in May at Victoria Miro, in London.

mitted that the only significant increase in N.P.I. scores over the past three decades has been among female college students—which might be a good thing, if agreeing with statements such as “I like to take responsibility for making decisions” represents an increase in agency.

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, a social psychologist who has been one of the foremost critics of the Generation Me theory, has argued that the current crop of young people are in fact more conscious of their relation to others, more generous and empathetic, than any before them. In 2013, in the journal *Emerging Adulthood*, Arnett debunked Twenge’s taxonomic methodology and her interpretation of her results, and marshaled statistics that, he argued, show millennials to be increasingly other-centered: car accidents and crime have declined, volunteerism is up, and teen pregnancy is down. Millennials are less racist, less sexist, and

less homophobic than their forebears. “Whatever we have been doing in our socialization of children,” Arnett wrote, “we should keep doing it.”

Behind the paywalls, psychologists squabble over sample size and the validity of certain measures; terms are defined and redefined. Such arguments are part of the work of social science, and indeed of any science. Yet analyses of the millennial narcissism epidemic often proceed not by engaging the difficult questions of how and why we diagnose the selfishness of others, or why there is so much disagreement in the field, but anecdote by anecdote, recounting the accumulated moments in which others display a selfishness that is surely different from, surely somehow worse than our own. If Arnett is right, the story of the narcissism epidemic is back where it began, in Ovid’s pool in the forest. To call it myth, however, is not to dismiss it. Any monster that



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"Open Fields," a photograph by Guillaume Amat, whose work was on view last year at Les Rencontres de la Photographie, in Arles, France.

seems so real must speak some truth. The question is not only whether we're getting any closer to the empirical evidence we crave, but why we crave it so acutely.

MTV assumed that people were hate-watching *My Super Sweet 16*; they followed up the series with a spin-off called *Exiled*, on which the beleaguered parents of the sweet sixteeners could send their children off to try to make their way under harsh conditions in poor, remote villages in other countries. *Exiled* was itself succeeded by a TV movie, *My Super Psycho Sweet 16*.

In her 2007 episode, when she suggests that the ambulances be redirected, even Allison seems to be in on the joke. "Oh my," the party planner says theatrically. "If Allison wants it," Allison's mother recites, as if by rote, "make it happen." On party day, Peachtree does appear to be closed

down. There is a parade, with a marching band, horses, and motorcycles. Allison arrives in a limo, exclaiming, "I'm the coolest person ever." Midway through the party a drunk friend throws up, and she kicks him out. Then G-Unit take the stage, everyone starts dancing, Allison's parents give her the keys to a Mercedes, and everyone agrees that it's the best party they've ever been to, as they do at the end of every episode. Cut to commercial.

It takes only a brief search to find out more about Allison's life. She was raised in a prominent African-American family in Buckhead, Atlanta's wealthiest neighborhood. Her father is the late Charles A. Mathis Jr., lawyer to TLC, Usher, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He was a brilliant litigator and was renowned for throwing some of the city's best parties. Allison grew up to marry DeQuan Jones, a basketball player. Together, they run JetJones, a foundation that helps impoverished children in

Atlanta succeed in school. Allison writes a lifestyle blog that encourages women to look good, be educated, and travel. In a list of the twenty-five favorite moments in her life so far, she reports that the moment she most loved, on the day of her party, was one “before the cameras started rolling,” when she and her mother shared breakfast in bed and talked, as they often do. She answers every commenter kindly. She comes across, in other words, as a real sweetheart.

Allison grew up wealthy in a city where wealth inequality is, according to a recent Brookings Institute report, among the highest in the nation, and more than twice the national average: in Atlanta, the 5 percent of households at the top have twenty times the money of the 20 percent of households at the bottom. Another study, in 2013, demonstrated that Atlanta’s poor have a harder time moving into a higher class than those in most other metropolitan regions. And Allison grew up black in a country where white families have 90 percent more wealth than African-American families, on average, even when controlling for education levels—a gap that hasn’t changed much in twenty-five years.

Which of these details matter when it comes to understanding why Allison might have wanted to celebrate an extravagant birthday party on television? We don’t know; we shouldn’t pretend to. But if Allison is representative of a generation, it’s one that faces considerable economic hardships. It is easier to talk about the ordinary dreams of the young—to go to college, to get promotions—as narcissistic than to talk about the various reasons these dreams will be thwarted. The current prophets of the epidemic, while they lament the rise of easy credit and the economic hardships facing the average family, report the narcissism of their subjects with moral outrage, and invite readers to take a position outside that culture, as diagnosticians and wary victims. In this apocalyptic moral drama, Allison performs as the pathologically selfish rich girl we condemn

so that we might remain the empathetic ones, the good ones.

In her classic book of 1979, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, Alice Miller gently hypothesizes that one of the most likely careers for people heavily invested in projecting a false self is psychology. Themselves often children of cold and selfish parents, therapists develop, from a young age, “special sensitivity to the unconscious signals manifesting the needs of others” and a strong motivation to employ this skill to manipulate people—under the mask of empathy. “Who else,” Miller writes, “without this previous history, would muster sufficient interest to spend the whole day trying to discover what is happening in other people’s unconscious?” The book is widely consid-

ered to be about narcissism, although Miller manages, blessedly, to avoid the word.

At least one psychometric study has since correlated N.P.I. scores with career paths, and it found that Miller is wrong; more often, people with high N.P.I. scores end up in business. But when psychology is conducted by surveying college students, by “convenience sample,” the data is gathered most often from students in psychology classrooms. This—not just college freshmen, but freshmen enrolled in psychology classes—is not only the cohort from which Twenge and Campbell’s thirty-year study was mainly drawn but also (according to one meta-analysis) the cohort that makes up 67 percent of subjects who participate in psychology studies. Which makes one wonder how much of the understanding of the self, mental health, and “normal” and “abnormal” psychology would be more accurately framed as an understanding of what young psychology students think about themselves.

If the sample seems rather selective, this is a matter of considerable discussion and concern among psychologists themselves. But it may not be so inaccurate if we consider how much the discipline of psychology permeates our lives, not only by way of therapy but by way of the methods that educators use to evaluate and place us, managers use to manage us, and corporations use to tabulate our every virtual move in order to find correlations that will provide marketers whose

[Poem]

WOMEN APPEARING AS PRESENTS

By Amanda Nadelberg, from a manuscript in progress. Nadelberg’s most recent collection of poetry, *Songs from a Mountain*, was published in May by Coffee House Press.

In the city every day
There is sun at three to
Be eaten at the tavern like
Brave potatoes on Sacramento
A vestibule of gender to look
At friends and wonder over
Zippers in unordinary places
An updated flash for songs
To be sung on machines
We drag to bed



Inside Outside, a painting incorporating postcards, by William Wegman, whose work was on view in April at Sperone Westwater, in New York City.

© THE ARTIST. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SPERONE WESTWATER, NEW YORK CITY

techniques were developed by this very same field with the secrets to selling us what we then believe we need. To cope with the pressure, we study the internet's translations of therapeutic psychology, and are taught to think positive thoughts. To relax, we take BuzzFeed personality quizzes, as if to scratch enjoyment out of the very kinds of measurements that determine our success, and even at the bar, we sit down and speak of our progress toward mental health—"I think I really figured it out"—and diagnose our family members and lovers and friends. And every reality-TV show offers a chance to watch what others do while under observation, how narcissistic they look under the pressure to compete, to assert themselves, in situations only a little more surveilled and surreal than our own. For a moment, we get to pretend that Allison's performance doesn't resemble ours.

Or you don't do all these things; one hopes you don't. If the prophets weren't sure we're using "I" too much, your writer would say, more accu-

rately, "This is how I am, sometimes," or "Sadly, this is what I do."

But if you do at least some of these things, maybe college students studying psychology are a sample that represents us after all. Maybe it's no wonder that prophecies of an epidemic of self-regard should feel so true, and that we should fetishize a warm, mutual empathy at the same time as we click and click to get the next hit of objectivity. After her episode of *My Super Sweet 16* aired, Allison wasn't sent to a remote, poverty-stricken village to suffer for her narcissism; she went to the University of Miami to get a B.A. in psychology.

At some point, because of "the biases that plague self-report measures," the authors of *The Narcissism Epidemic* began counting words. Writing "I" corresponds to self-centeredness, they asserted, and writing "we" corresponds to other-centeredness. They found exactly what they were

looking for—since 1960, there's been a 10 percent decrease in the use of "us" and "we," and a 42 percent increase in "I" and "me." They also found that the use of "you" and "your" has quadrupled, but rather than seeing this as evidence of other-focus, or a symptom of the proliferation of psychological self-help books, they took this "increased tendency to directly address the reader and include him or her in the dialogue" to be "another indicator of individualism."

The authors do write "we" rather than "I," but then again, there are usually two of them, sometimes six or seven, writing together. This writer is hunched over her computer in a dark, high-walled room, alone, forehead creased at the study on her screen, thinking of sentences like "I'm sorry" and "I love you" and "Let me help." She is thinking of a study that found that "communal narcissists" attempt to satisfy narcissistic needs by being obviously generous, politically engaged, and emphasizing their care for others. She is worrying that if attempts to perform empathy, compassion, and sociality can all be symptoms of a pathological need to maintain one's sense of self, and if it's true that you might use "we" because you're vainly attached to presenting an image of collectivity—not to mention the possibility that, on the other hand, the 42 percent increase in the use of "I" might be a symptom of an increase in people taking more responsibility for their actions—this word counting is useless. What's left are stories, and a myth that just feels true.

I email Allison, and she swiftly sends her number. "I pride myself on being an open book," she says.

"A lot of my sweet sixteen didn't have to do with me," Allison tells me. It was her father's party: he'd planned it all, far in advance of being approached by MTV. When the camera crews arrived, there wasn't much to do, so "we were kind of reaching for material," the family pretending to plan, to shop, to talk to the party planner about an entrance parade. This was pretty obvious from the episode, I say, and she laughs. She's not that concerned. For her, the day was about her dad. "Every little girl wants to be like her daddy in some way," she says, "and that was my way to be like him, to have a huge party."

The show made it seem as if it were the other way around, I point out, as if she were a domineering teen and her parents were doing whatever she said. She agrees. "There's a lot of leading questions, like, 'Oh, so you really want this party to be great, and you want your friends to have a really great time, right?' And you're like, 'Yeah.' And they're like, 'Can you repeat that back?'"

I ask her about the things she does—blogging, posting careful selfies of her new outfits, performing her life online—that make millennials seem,

to those who are older, so mysterious, shallow, and conceited. "I don't think we are necessarily narcissistic," she says. "This is going to sound narcissistic, but I think we care about each other more."

This confuses me, until I realize that she means we care more about strangers. "We care about other people's experiences," she confirms, "even if we'll never meet them. I care about the girl I don't know who's writing a blog about how she and her husband, as newlyweds, packed up and traveled the world. I want to read it; I'm glad she's sharing it." I ask her why she cares, and she says, "Because I think I can learn from her."

Once Allison gets her counseling degree, she hopes to work with couples. She's always believed in family and wanted to understand how it works.

The cameras couldn't show her future, any more than they showed that on her sixteenth birthday, it was only one lane of Peachtree's six that was shut down for five minutes, and it wasn't Allison's idea at all.

[Fiction]

PET SEMINARY

By Joy Williams, from Ninety-Nine Stories of God, which was published last month by Tin House Books. Williams is the author of four previous short-story collections and four novels, including The Quick and the Dead.

29

One of the schools I attended as a child arranged for our class to visit a slaughterhouse. This was to prepare us for what the authorities called the *real world* as well as to show us what *real work*, rather than intellectual labor, sometimes consists of. We were bused to the facility, but there, more sensible heads prevailed, for we were not allowed inside. We neither saw nor heard any pigs, but we did see vast brown *lagoons*, which we were told were part of the operation, as well as a number of gleaming refrigerated trucks, their engines idling. There was also a smell that we had never been subjected to before.

Later in the semester, someone brought to our attention a newspaper article concerning a pig who saved a man from drowning. This pig, a pet, was swimming in a lake with her master. There were a number of people playing in the lake at the time, this being a holiday weekend. The pig, noticing a man in distress, swam over to him and by her actions indicated that he should grasp on to the harness, which

she always wore, being a pet. She then towed the fellow to safety.

The newspaper, which was a reliable one, maintained this story to be true. Later, the reporter mischievously posed this question: Would the pig have rescued the man if she had known that he and his companions had just enjoyed a picnic of ham sandwiches?

[Hazards]

GRAVEYARD SHIFT

From work-related fatalities reported to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration since 2014.

Worker died after falling into cement mixer.

Worker died after falling into vat of boiling water and oil.

Worker killed after being pulled through wood-chipping machine.

Worker trimming palm tree killed when tree collapsed.

Worker mowing grass choked on low-lying tree.

Worker inspecting bridge swept away by water and drowned.

Worker fatally engulfed by soybeans.

Worker fatally crushed under 800-pound hay bale.

Worker fatally crushed by log pile.

Worker fatally crushed by falling concrete slab.

Worker fatally crushed by robotic arm.

Worker died after becoming caught in dough mixer.

Worker died after becoming trapped inside walk-in freezer.

Worker asphyxiated when clothing became caught in motor driveshaft of bowling-lane pinsetter.

Worker struck and killed by discharging fire extinguisher.

Worker struck and killed by glass tabletop blown from balcony by high winds.

Worker struck and killed by tape measure that fell from skyscraper.

Worker struck and killed by gondola car that fell from amusement-park ride.

Worker electrocuted while servicing arcade vending machine.

Worker died after contracting flesh-eating bacteria.

Worker killed by bees nesting in air-conditioning unit.

Worker installing home-security system fatally shot.

The pig's owner replied that pigs are intelligent, more intelligent than dogs, but they are not omniscient.

31

The Lord wants to give a dinner party but can never come up with twelve guests.

Whatever steward He has at the time suggests many names, but the Lord can't get excited about any of them.

At least the menu was determined long ago. There would be a mixture of fifty pure chemicals—sugar, amino and fatty acids, vitamins and minerals, all made from rocks, air, and water, without any killing at all.

53

Jack and Pat were in their seventies now and had no pets, although they had had several in the course of their days, mostly dogs, but once a bird as well. Their most remarkable dog, Jack and Pat said, was a pit bull, Peggy. She was the sweetest, smartest dog, they said.

This was long ago. The boy they adopted as an infant is in his thirties now. When they brought the baby home, Peggy was curious about him and protective and adoring in a way Jack and Pat increasingly found to be alarming. Jack, a physician, decided that for everyone's peace of mind, Peggy should be *put down*. From the pharmacy at the hospital where he worked, he procured a large amount of expired Valium. The plan was to mix the crushed Valium with a pound of ground sirloin. Ground sirloin was Peggy's favorite food. When she was a very good dog she received it, and Peggy knew that when it was presented to her she had been a very good dog or for one reason or another had pleased Jack and Pat.

Jack and Pat discussed at length the sad necessity of *putting Peggy down* for everyone's peace of mind, but when the moment came, Jack could not bring himself to lace the ground sirloin with the crushed Valium. Nor could Pat perform this act. Peggy was a good dog, she would not harm their little child.

Relieved to have made their decision, Jack and Pat filled Peggy's bowl with the untainted meat and placed it before her.

But Peggy would not touch it. She gazed at it, then gazed at Jack and Pat and left the room. Sometimes, for years, when Jack and Pat had friends over for dinner or cards, they would put a bowl of ground sirloin before Peggy and she would never touch it. Of course the story was told again and again. The guests were always amazed.

73

The Lord was living with a great colony of bats in a cave. Two boys with BB guns found the cave

and killed many of the bats outright, leaving many more to die of their injuries. The boys didn't see the Lord. He didn't make His presence known to them.

On the other hand, the Lord was very fond of the bats, but had done nothing to save them.

He was becoming harder and harder to comprehend.

He liked to hang with the animals, everyone knew that, the whales and bears, the elephants and bighorn sheep and wolves. They were rather wishing He wasn't so partial to their company.

Hang more in the world of men, they begged Him.

But the Lord said He was lonely there.

[Inventory]

SOMETHING ABOUT EATING

By Robert Walser (1878–1956), from *Girlfriends, Ghosts, and Other Stories*, a collection that will be published next month by NYRB Classics. Translated from the German by Tom Whalen.

Today I am discoursing on food, which is a necessity and at the same time can be a pleasure.

An apple at first seems to me a fine comestible, although I fear for a tooth when I bite into it. I prefer to eat it cooked rather than in its natural state.

Pears taste scrumptiously succulent. Nuts I handle with care, in that I chop them up fine in order to enhance their flavor.

Bread is as nutritious as it is delicious, if handled moderately. In my opinion a piece of chocolate can replace a cup of coffee.

Next in line comes meat, which naturally, of course, is something wonderful. How superbly baked fish agrees with me. Veal and lamb, each on its own, can also be most appetizing.

Beets are red, spinach and lettuce green, likewise beans, which perhaps I prefer above all other vegetables. Chicken in a sauce can be recommended as something tender.

Nonetheless, carefully prepared roast beef reinvigorates me to the utmost degree. I have a special predilection for eating sauerkraut with sausage.

Without hesitation I declare rice one of the most agreeable foods. In no way does asparagus seem indispensable; all the same, I

appreciate it as a delicacy and highly esteem its digestibility.

Every sensible person sincerely praises a bowl of soup. From cherries and apricots we make pies.

Meals are eaten either at home or in a restaurant, bringing differences to light that aren't necessarily significant.

Wherever we eat, certain useful precepts learned from experience are observed, for example, the little bit of politeness with which we sit down at the table and which consists, among other things, of our being satisfied with both the quantity of the dishes and their quality.

To treat food attentively enhances its value.

[Advice]

LEAVES OF GRASSFED

From "Manly Health and Training, with Off-hand Hints Toward Their Conditions," an article published by Walt Whitman in 1858 under the pseudonym Mose Velsor. It was reprinted by the Walt Whitman Quarterly Review in the Winter/Spring 2016 issue.

Usually breakfast, for a hearty man, might consist in a plate of fresh rare lean meat, without fat or gravy, a slice or chunk of bread, and, if desired, a cup of tea.

Dinner should consist of a good plate of fresh meat (rare lean beef, broiled or roast, is best), with as few outside condiments as possible.

In our view, if nine tenths of all the various culinary preparations and combinations, vegetables, pastry, soups, stews, sweets, baked dishes, salads, things fried in grease, and all the vast array of confections, creams, pies, jellies, &c. were utterly swept aside, and a simple meat diet substituted in their place—we will be candid about it, and say in plain words *an almost exclusively meat diet*—the result would be greatly, very greatly, in favor of that noble-bodied, pure-blooded, and superior race we have had a leaning toward.

One of the greatest mistakes made in arbitrary theories of certain things supposed to be conducive to health is that they forget that the true theory of health is multiform, and does not consist of one or two rules alone. The vegetarian, for instance, insists on the total salvation of the human race, if they would only abstain from animal food! This is ridiculous.

[Letter]

COCK AND BALL STORY

From *Jay to Bee*, a collection of letters by Janet Frame (1924–2004) to William Theophilus Brown, a painter, and published in May by Counterpoint. Frame was the author of thirteen novels. This letter was written at Yaddo, a writers' colony, on January 8, 1970.

Dear Bill,

(Breakfast: choice of cereal, raisins, wheat germ. Orange juice. Eggs anyhow. Coffee. Toast, etc.)

Already I've begun my countdown of dinners—only so many left! They're an ordeal. I just can't bear dining in the presence of authorities. Everything is so formal, everybody so bloody well-behaved, and after dinner we seem to be expected to sit and make conversation. So far I haven't said a word—oh yes I said one or two last night and regretted them immediately. I almost spoke at dinner when the discussion was about repairing cars and washing machines and so on, the cost, the shoddy workmanship . . . and everyone had spoken—after all, the topic is not intellectually demanding and even babies might be expected to speak a line . . . and I had in mind my experience of inserting a new ball cock into my plumbing at home, and so, with heart beating fast at the contemplation of my daring, I framed, mentally, my opening sentence—"I once spent all day putting in a new ball cock"—but every time an opportunity came for me to contribute I panicked and said nothing and so the Yaddo meal table never heard of my indelicate experience. Later, as we sat in the anteroom, with everyone talking except me, I spoke a sentence. The topic was Marisol, whom someone described as a disconcerting person because she would go to a party and sit and never speak all evening. I murmured, too softly for anyone to hear, "There's a description of her in that article on the Tenth Street Painters."

"What? What? What did you say? What? What? What?"

Oh my God! I didn't have the courage to speak another sentence, so I just mumbled and blushed and resolved never to speak again.

(Dinner: Pork chops, applesauce, whipped potatoes, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, carrots. Indian pudding and ice cream. Coffee and cream.)

[Reflection]

LOTION

By Simone White, from *Of Being Dispersed*, a collection of poetry that was published in May by Futurepoem Books. White's previous collection is *Unrest*.

I came upon some unfamiliar lotion* and began to think.

Let us suppose that lotion begins with principles of emulsion, which we know about from food making. The best lotions are made from what you can eat: fats pressed from the olive and the avocado; kernels, seeds, and germs of shea, palm, peanut, almond, primrose, sunflower, safflower, wheat; even the unlikely peach; even the apricot; the weird oils (O blubber of whale, O America) lanolin and jojoba; fragrant essence of lavender, rose, lemon, sage. When applied to skin in their unprocessed form, any of these—all—naturally begin to rot.

I do not wash my head every day unless I have been swimming, which I don't do often, as I live in New York and do not swim for exercise. Of a winter's morning when I take off my hat, it is thrilling and also repulsive to perceive a signal odor of black womanhood, rancid oil on the scalp, an odor lodged in memory quite near the smell of lightly singed hair, distinct from the smell of hair and skin chemically burned or "cured" by lye. Anyone who has ever been inside a hair salon frequented by black women knows this trinity of odors. Anyone who has ever been near a black woman knows it. (See footnote.)

Indeed, just the other day, because I care for my own hair and skin, I took the unusual step of washing and ironing my hair before beginning an ordinary day of errands, study, and writing.

Because it was a cold fall day, instead of twisting my hair into a knot and securing it with pins, as is my usual practice on a workday, it occurred to me to rest both hair and scalp by wearing a wool newsboy cap. Carelessly, I shoved my hair under a hat.

* This excellent product was manufactured by the company of an old and dear friend, now a successful entrepreneur whose ventures include a mini-hair salon set discreetly behind a curtain in a shop otherwise devoted to the sale of lotions, shampoos, and other beauty products.

Of course, lotion occurs at an intersection of blackness and the market. Lotion and the practices it invokes—simple acts of living such as becoming wet or dry, ingesting or covering oneself in stuff of life—is the undressed and feminine doppelgänger of an imaginary space almost completely filled by black music, which dominates every attempt to materialize black imagination. That is, to bring the materially improved self and world into existence.

Lotion proposes roughness, a core condition prone to freaks; it is, in the presence of the corrigible, those who are in need, a simulacrum of all the suckings-off the world has ever known.



Photographs from the series *Tokyo Parrots*, by Yoshinori Mizutani, whose work was on view in June at Festival Photo La Gacilly, in France.

A few floppy curls fell out. These I tucked behind my ears. The wind was blowing. I could smell the clean burn of my clean hair on Nostrand Avenue. I could smell it on the A train. It felt good to know that I was capable of caring for my hair and for myself in this way. Keeping it loose under my cap, I had coaxed my hair back to health, finally, after submitting to the simple, counterintuitive truth that it acts better when I keep it straight. This isn't true for everyone, but it is true for me and my particular hair, known in the literature as type 3c. (Or it might be 4a.) Black hair in its natural state is delicate, and I haven't the time to cultivate mine in the necessary way. I am an intellectual and a woman who must go to work and tend to her own survival. I accept, in my fortieth year, that the work of caring for my natural hair can, at last, be forgone. When I come out of the shower or the sea and people see my hair coiled around my face, they want to know something about why I do not choose this as my default appearance. My sister, my mother, and my husband do not ask this silly question; they leave me to my business.

I got to my university and I walked into the ladies' room, removing my hat as I entered. A white woman (much older than I am, she should

have known better) came out of the john to announce, quite loudly, "Oh my God, what is that smell? Something is burning!" Well, nothing was burning. It was just my hair. Let me remind you that we were in a public toilet, where all manner of odors proliferate, the least of which, I think, is the smell of scalded shampoo and protein. "I don't think anything is on fire," I told her, and went into a stall to pee.

My toilette is simple and extremely rigorous. Wash my head once a week. Attend to oral hygiene as frequently as is necessary. (In an age when almost everyone in the city carries some kind of pack, I cannot see why we should not have inside our packs a toothbrush and floss, at the very least. I like to have a little peroxide. My mother taught me this and her mother taught her: hydrogen peroxide for debriding and killing whatever tries to live in the mouth.) Pedicures twice a month, never resorting to chemical removal of skin. I keep my fingernails short and bare. Frequently, I wear no makeup at all, although if I am feeling old or not very pretty I resort to a little kohl and gloss. Bathe no less than twice a day. Bathing more frequently than this is a sign of mental illness. Less—for others—is fine.

I remove hair with enormous frequency, but I do not follow the most common or popular practices in this regard. I rarely cut the hair on my head, for example; I find that unnecessary. Since I keep my hair long, it maintains itself in decent order without the constant trimming many hairstylists recommend. (See footnote.) In summer, I respect the moderately oppressive governing expectation that I should remove hair under my arms, and from my legs, groin, and belly. In colder months, I remove hair only as my lover requests, and reluctantly, since I cannot overstate the discomfort and rage I experience each time I subject myself to any variation of the bikini wax, a barbaric and bizarre practice, the basic point of which (removing hair from the opening of the vagina and around the clitoris) can be accomplished painlessly with a thirty-five-dollar pair of electric clippers that serve for years.

Although women speak loudly and publicly of the removal of hair from their labia and ass-cracks, it is considered unseemly to speak of a woman's facial hair with the exception of certain topics, rigorously delineated. Women and men may speak openly of the practice of shaping a woman's eyebrows. With an intimate, one may speak of removing hair above the upper lip or of the removal of a few stray hairs on the chin with a tweezer. Only one woman, as hirsute as myself, has ever spoken to me of the removal of hair from her neck, from her entire face, in copious amounts from her chin, and she was herself a well-compensated expert in these matters, and a black woman, and a beauty. The aestheticians who remove hair from my face play a special role in my life.

The slightly ridiculous bodily conditions each of us lives with daily—after a day of not-writing, the collected and swept-up pile of flakes from my cuticles, black oils scraped from beneath my thumbnails, the stray bit of scalp, something swabbed from the cat's eye.

One commercial lotion for my face, one for my body, one for my cuticles and the odd blemish or rash, one for my hands, several for my hair; those I recommend to others, recommendations I have taken. In the refrigerator, ongoing experiments with volatile fats (coconut oil, pure shea); on my bureau, emergency lotion purchased while out of town, disregarded as useless—wrongly conceived and executed with unreasonably high alcohol or glycerin content. Lotions that are too thin. For years and years, nothing sold over the counter worked. For lifelong care of simple dry skin, nothing a dermatologist has ever prescribed works. Nothing sold in a department store works. (Occasionally, a wonder like Oil of Olay!) Lotions whose makers choose (wisely) to make a great

deal of money instead of excellent lotion. Always Vaseline in a pinch. A dab of olive oil is a quick fix.

Lotion is a palliative. What does it correct? It corrects ash. What is ash? Ash is a gray track of evident decay, most striking in contrast with darker skins, brown skins, tending to black.

After bathing, I apply both face and body lotions. After handwashing, hand lotion. In the winter, I apply an extra layer of thick, oily cream, too oily for the hands (but good for the thin skin on the shins, which cracks in cold, dry weather), to my heels and elbows. Sometimes I notice a black woman unknown to me, not homeless, whose legs or feet or hands are so ashy that I wonder whether she has lost her mind.

Liniments are a second class of lotions, meant to address a deeper set of problems.

I find myself on my knees with some rags and a bucket filled with scalding soapy water and bleach. My mother has visited and discovered some scuzz on the stepladder that I am obliged to use for retrieving bowls, pitchers, and the like from the uppermost shelves in my apartment. I am wiping clots of greasy dirt from the rungs of this already ugly metal thing, scrubbing also the dirty bands of floor that protrude beyond spaces that “cannot be cleaned”—the edge-of-under the refrigerator, the stove, the dishwasher, the poorly installed, cheap Formica cabinets. Filth. On my knees now, I perform an act of penitence; in that this dirt has been discovered and named and pointed to, I am humiliated; in that suggestions have been made regarding the method of its eradication too I am humiliated. Over the telephone, my mother insists that I kneel, of course, on some towels or sheets, folded several times to protect my knees from being scratched or scraped, made dark or scaly from work. “Are you wearing gloves?” she asks. “You wouldn’t want to get an infection. It’s how your father almost lost his arm. They made him scrub the floors.” My father had osteomyelitis as a teenager. A serious infection led to several botched surgeries, all performed while he was locked up in a facility for juveniles somewhere outside Philadelphia. In fights, he used his casts as weapons, and he never recovered the full use of his scarred right arm and hand. I never knew that, about the floors, I tell my mother, sloshing a rag around in the putrid bucket.

Our crooked fingers are soft, soft, all my parents’ children.

I maintain dominion over the crevices of myself, deep into the layers of my skin, which must never be questioned. Never doubt that these crevices extend toward an infinitely receding boundary. Come close to me to feel it.



"Nail Houses," photographs by Peter Bialobrzeski, whose work was on view in March at L.A. Galerie–Lothar Albrecht, in Frankfurt, Germany.



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THE ORIGINS OF SPEECH

In the beginning was Chomsky
By Tom Wolfe

Nobody in academia had ever witnessed or even heard of a performance like this before. In just a few years, in the early 1950s, a University of Pennsylvania graduate student—a *student*, in his twenties—had taken over an entire field of study, linguistics, and stood it on its head and *hardened* it from a spongy so-called “social science” into a real science, a *hard* science, and put his name on it: Noam Chomsky.

At the time, Chomsky was still finishing his doctoral dissertation for Penn, where he had completed his graduate-school course work. But at bedtime and in his heart of hearts he was living in Boston as a junior member of Harvard’s Society of Fellows, and creating a Harvard-level name for himself.

This moment was the high tide of the “scientificization” that had become fashionable just after World War II. Get hard! Whatever you do, make it sound scientific! Get out from under the stigma of studying a “social science”! By now “social” meant soft in the brain pan. Sociologists, for example, were willing to do anything to avoid the stigma. They tried to observe and record hour-by-hour conversations, meetings, correspondence, even routes taken by individuals, and make the information really hard by converting it into algorithms full of calculus symbols that gave it the look of mathematical certainty. And they failed totally. Only Chomsky, in linguistics, managed to pull it off and

turn all—or almost all—the pillow heads in the field rock-hard.

Even before receiving his Ph.D., Chomsky was invited to lecture at Yale and the University of Chicago. He introduced a radically new theory of language. Language was not something you *learned*. You were born with a built-in “language organ.” It is functioning the moment you come into the world, just the way your heart and your kidneys are already pumping and filtering and excreting away.

To Chomsky, it didn’t matter what a child’s first language was. Whatever it was, every child’s language organ could use the “deep structure,” “universal grammar,” and “language acquisition device” he was born with to express what he had to say, no matter whether it came out of his mouth in English or Urdu or Nagamese. That was why—as Chomsky said repeatedly—children started speaking so early in life ... and so correctly in terms of grammar. They were born with the language organ in place and the power ON. By the age of two, usually, they could speak in whole sentences and generate completely original ones. The “organ” ... the “deep structure” ... the “universal grammar” ... the “device”—as Chomsky explained it, the system was physical, empirical, organic, biological. The power of the language organ sent the universal grammar coursing through the deep structure’s lingual ducts to



Tom Wolfe is a contributing editor of Harper’s Magazine. This is an excerpt from his new book, *The Kingdom of Speech*, out this month from Little, Brown.

provide nutrition for the LAD, which everybody in the field now knew referred to the “language acquisition device” Chomsky had discovered.

Two years later, in 1957, when he was twenty-eight, Chomsky pulled all this together in a book with the opaque title *Syntactic Structures*—and was on the way to becoming the biggest name in the history of linguistics. He drove the discipline indoors and turned it upside down. There were thousands of languages on earth, which to earthlings sounded like a hopeless Babel of biblical proportions. That was where Chomsky’s soon-to-be-famous Martian linguist came in. A Martian linguist arriving on earth, he often said ... often ... often ... would immediately realize that all the languages on this planet were the same, with just some minor local accents. And the

and visage turned a challenger’s power of reason to jelly.

Young charismatic figures are not a rare breed. In new religious movements they have tended to be the rule, not the exception: Joseph Smith of the Mormons ... Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha ... Scientology’s David Miscavige, a “prodigy” and L. Ron Hubbard’s handpicked successor ... the Báb, forerunner of the Baha’i faith ... the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Charles Taze Russell ... and Moishe Rosen of Jews for Jesus. Likewise in warfare: Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, a seventeen-year-old enlisted man taking over an infantry company in the midst of battle ... Joan of Arc, a French peasant girl who becomes an army general and the greatest heroine in French history—at the age of nineteen ... Napoléon Bonaparte, who

ONLY WEARILY COULD CHOMSKY ENDURE TRADITIONAL LINGUISTS WHO
THOUGHT FIELDWORK WAS ESSENTIAL AND WOUND UP IN PRIMITIVE PLACES,
EMERGING FROM THE TALL GRASS ZIPPING THEIR PANTS UP

Martian arrived on earth during almost every Chomsky talk on language.

Only wearily could Chomsky endure traditional linguists who thought fieldwork was essential and wound up in primitive places, emerging from the tall grass zipping their pants up. They were like the ordinary flycatchers in Darwin’s day coming back from the middle of nowhere with their sacks full of little facts and buzzing about with their beloved multi-language fluency. But what difference did it make, knowing all those native tongues? Chomsky made it clear he was elevating linguistics to the altitude of Plato’s transcendent eternal universals. They, not sacks of scattered facts, were the ultimate reality, the only true objects of knowledge. Besides, he didn’t enjoy the outdoors, where “the field” was. He was relocating the field to Olympus. Not only that, he was giving linguists permission to stay air-conditioned. They wouldn’t have to leave the building at all, ever again ... no more trekking off to interview boneheads in stench-humid huts. And here on Olympus, you had plumbing.

Chomsky had a personality and a charisma equal to Georges Cuvier’s in France in the early 1800s. Cuvier orchestrated his belligerence from sweet reason to outbursts of perfectly timed and rhetorically elegant fury. In contrast, nothing about Chomsky’s charisma was elegant. He spoke in a monotone and never raised his voice, but his eyes lasered any challenger with a look of absolute authority. He wasn’t debating him, he was enduring him. Something about Chomsky’s unchanging tone

by the age of twenty-nine had led victories against French Royalist forces as well as the Austrians and the Ottoman Empire ... Alexander the Great, who had conquered much of the Hellenistic world before his thirtieth birthday ... William Wallace, Guardian of Scotland, who at twenty-seven led the Scots to victory over the British at the Battle of Stirling Bridge.

Charismatic leaders radiate more than simple confidence. They radiate authority. They don’t tell jokes or speak ironically, except to rebuke—as in “Kindly spare me your ‘originality.’” Irony, like plain humor, invariably turns upon some indulgence of human weakness. Charismatic figures show only strength. They refuse to buckle under in the face of threats, including physical threats. They are usually prophets of some new idea or cause.

Chomsky’s idea of the “language organ” created great excitement among young linguists. He made the field seem loftier, more tightly structured, more scientific, more conceptual, more on a Platonic plane, not just a huge heaped-up leaf pile of the data fieldworkers brought in from places one never necessarily heard of before ... linguistics would no longer mean working out in the field among more breeds of Na—*er*—indigenous peoples ... than one ever dreamed existed. Thanks to Chomsky’s success, linguistics rose from being merely a satellite orbiting around language studies and became the main event on the cutting edge... The number of full, formed departments of linguistics soared, as did the numbers of fieldworkers. Fieldwork

was no longer a requirement, however, and more linguists than dared confess it were relieved not to have to go into the not-so-great outdoors. Now all the new, Higher Things in a linguist's life were to be found indoors, at a desk ... looking at learned journals with cramped type instead of at a bunch of faces in a cloud of gnats.

In a rare recorded instance of someone confronting him over this business of a language organ, Chomsky finessed his way out of it *con brio*. The writer John Gliedman asked Chomsky the Question. Was he saying he had found a part of human anatomy that all the anatomists, internists, surgeons, and pathologists in the world had never laid eyes on?

It wasn't a question of laying eyes on it, Chomsky indicated, because the language organ was located inside the brain.

Was he saying that one organ, the language organ, was inside another organ, the brain? But organs are by definition discrete entities. "Is there a special place in the brain and a particular kind of neurological structure that comprises the language organ?" asked Gliedman.

"Little enough is known about cognitive systems and their neurological basis," said Chomsky. "But it does seem that the representation and use of language involve specific neural structures, though their nature is not well understood."

It was just a matter of time, he suggested, before empirical research substantiated his analysis. He appeared to be on the verge of the most important anatomical discovery since William Harvey's discovery of the human circulatory system in 1628.

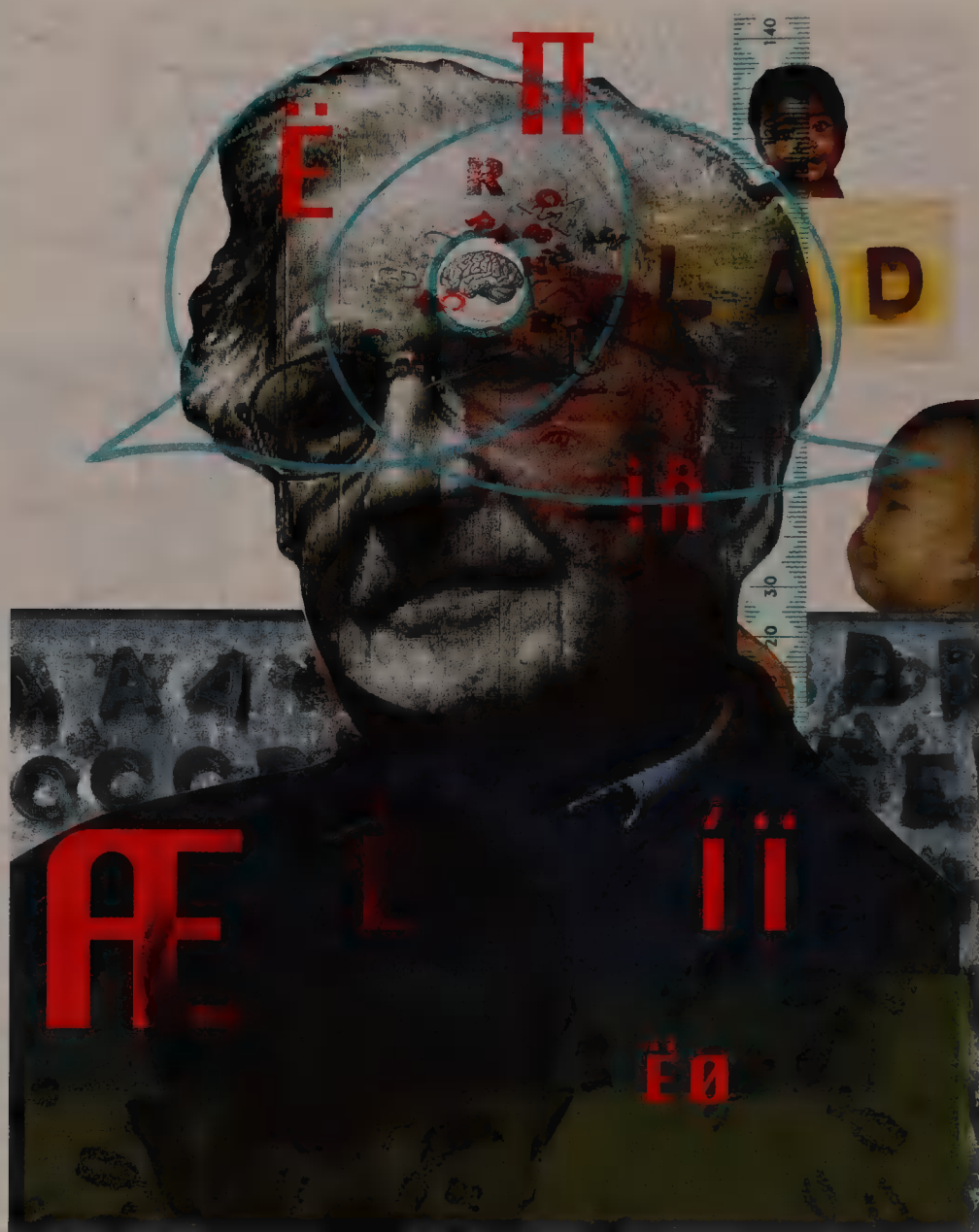
Soon Noam Chomsky's reign in linguistics was so supreme, it reduced other linguists to filling in gaps and supplying footnotes for Noam Chomsky. As for any random figure of note who persisted in challenging his authority, Chomsky would summarily dismiss him as a "fraud," a "liar," or a "charlatan." He called B. F. Skinner, Elie Wiesel, and "the American intellectual community" frauds. He called Alan Dershowitz, Christopher Hitchens, and Werner Cohn liars. He pinned the *charlatan* tag on the famous French psychiatrist Jacques Lacan.

Not really very nice—but at least he woke everybody in the field up. All at once academics, even anthropologists and sociologists, discovered the subject of linguistics. Chomsky had provided them the entire structure, anatomy, and physiology of language as a system.

But there remained this baffling business of figuring out just *what it was*—the creation of the

words themselves, the specific sounds and how they were fitted together, the mechanics of the greatest single power known to man ... *How do people do it?* ... and their eyes opened wide as if nobody had ever thought of it before. What would eventually become thousands of articles and conference papers began chundering forth.

One of the most revealing examples of Chomsky's power was when Roger Wescott, the linguist



William Stokoe of Gallaudet University (for the deaf), and the anthropologist Gordon Hewes summed up two decades of writing, separately, about sign language by joining forces and editing *Language Origins*—with the proud claim that they had filled in a gap in Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures*.

And on they came, linguists and anthropologists intent upon shoring up Chomsky's great edifice with evidence ... the *gestural theory* ... the *big brain theory* ... the *social complexity theory* ... and ... and ...

... and more and more scholars sat at their desks just like junior Chomskys trying to solve the mysteries of language with sheer brainpower. The results were not electrifying.

Nevertheless, Chomsky had brought the field back to life.

In February of 1967—*bango!*—Chomsky shot up clear through the roof of their little world of linguistics and lit up the sky ... with a 12,000-word excoriation of America's role in the war in Vietnam entitled "The Responsibility of Intellectuals." *The New York Review of Books*, the most fashionable organ of the New Left in the Vietnam era, published it as a special supplement.

The piece delivered a shock beyond even Chomsky's never-modest expectations. From the very first paragraph to the last, he tore into the United States's "capitalist" rulers, its supine press, its by turns apathetic and pliable intellectuals. He rolled the country over like a big soggy log, exposing the rot rot rot rot on the underside. He accused the United States of "vicious terror bombings of civilians, perfected as a technique of warfare by the Western democracies and reaching their culmination in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, surely among the most unspeakable crimes in history."

And Vietnam? "We can hardly avoid asking ourselves to what extent the American people bear responsibility for the savage American assault on a largely helpless rural population in Vietnam, still another atrocity in what Asians see as the 'Vasco da Gama era'—meaning imperialist—"of world history. As for those of us who stood by in silence and apathy as this catastrophe slowly took shape over the past dozen years—on what page of history do we find our proper place? Only the most insensible can escape these questions. ...

"It is the responsibility of intellectuals," he said, "to speak the truth and to expose lies. This, at least, may seem enough of a truism to pass over without comment. Not so, however. For the modern intellectual, it is not at all obvious."

This was an angry god raining fire and brimstone down not merely upon worldlings committing beastly crimes but also upon the anointed angels who had grown soft, corrupt, and silent to the point of complicity with the very forces of Evil it is their sacred duty to protect mankind from.

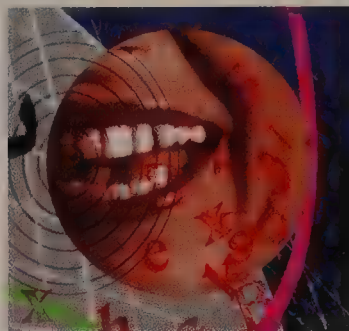
It was this rebuke of the intellectuals that turned "The Responsibility of Intellectuals" into more than just a provocative essay by an eminent linguist. It became an *event*, an event on

the magnitude of Émile Zola's *J'Accuse* in 1898, during the Dreyfus affair in France ... when Georges Clemenceau, a radical socialist (later prime minister of France—twice), turned the adjective "intellectual" into a noun: "the intellectual." At that point "the intellectuals" replaced the old term "the clerisy." Zola, Anatole France, and Octave Mirbeau were *the intellectuals* uppermost in Clemenceau's mind, but he by no means restricted that honorific to writers. Anyone involved in any way in the arts, politics, education—even journalism—who discussed the Higher Things from an at least vaguely savory socialist point of view qualified. So from the very beginning *the intellectual* was a hard-to-define, in fact rather blurry, figure who gave off whiffs—at least that much, whiffs—of Left-aware politics and alienation of some sort.

Chomsky proved to be perfect for the role, and not just because of his academic charisma. More

important was timing. He knew how to exploit a tremendous stroke of luck: *another war!*—this one in a little country in South-east Asia. It was a small war compared to World War II, but the jolt it gave universities and colleges in America was just as severe. The draft had been reinstated. Male students rose up in protest and the girls tagged along with them and faculty members

sang along with them through every last bar of their anthem, "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag" (to be replaced two years later with "Give Peace a Chance"). In 1967 tremendous pressure, social pressure, began to build up among *the intellectuals* to prove they were more than spectators in the grandstand cheering the brave members of the Movement on. The time had come to prove you were an "activist," i.e., a *brave* intellectual willing to leave the office, go to the streets, and take part in antiwar demonstrations. The pressure on figures like Chomsky, who was only thirty-eight, was intense. And he did his part, left the building, and marched in the most publicized demonstration of all, the March on the Pentagon in 1967. He proved he was the real thing. He got himself arrested and wound up in the same cell with Norman Mailer, who was an "activist" of what was known as the Radical Chic variety. A Radical Chic protester got himself arrested in the late morning or early afternoon, in mild weather. He was booked and released in time to make it to the Electric Circus, that year's New York nightspot of the century, and tell war stories. Chomsky cofounded an organization called Resist and got himself arrested so many times that his wife was afraid MIT would finally get tired of it and can him.



She began studying linguistics herself, formally, so that she might teach and at least keep bodies and souls together in the family.

No one seemed to realize it, but the anti-war movement had brought out in Chomsky some real-enough political convictions from his childhood, ideas long since dried up and irrelevant—one would have thought. Chomsky was born and raised in Philadelphia, but his parents were among tens of thousands of Ashkenazic Jews who fled Russia following the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881. Jewish anarchists were singled out (falsely) as the assassins, setting off waves of the bloodiest pogroms in history.

Anarchism had been a logical enough reaction. The word “anarchy” literally means “without rulers.” The Jewish refugees from Russian racial hatred translated that as not merely no more

radical Left, if not an outright Communist. But he routinely denounced the Soviet Union and Marxism–Leninism as well as capitalism and the United States. He was above their tawdry battles. An angry god was speaking from a higher plane.

Chomsky’s audacity and his exotic Old World, Eastern European slant on life were things most intellectuals found charming, since by then, 1967, opposition to the war in Vietnam had become something stronger than a passion ... namely, a fashion, a certification that one had risen above the herd. This set off what economists call the multiplier effect. Chomsky’s politics enhanced his reputation as a great linguist, and his reputation as a great linguist enhanced his reputation as a political solon, and his reputation as a political solon inflated his reputation from great linguist to

EVEN IN ACADEMIA IT NO LONGER MATTERED WHETHER ONE AGREED WITH
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czars ... but no more authorities of any sort ... no public officials, no police, no army, no courts of law, no judges, no jailors, no banks—no money—no financial system at all ... in short, no government ... and no social classes, either. The dream was of a land made up entirely of communes (not terribly different from the hippie communes of the United States in the 1960s).

A dream it was ... a dream ... and talk talk it was, and endless theory theory theory, until—¡milagroso! ¡maravilla!—more than half of a major nation, Spain, was taken over by anarchist *cooperativas* during the first years, 1936–1938, of the Spanish Civil War ... when the Loyalists, as they were known, were in power. In 1939 General Francisco Franco and his forces crushed the Loyalists in one of their last strongholds, Barcelona, leading to the memorable gob-of-guilt-in-your-eye cry, “Where were you when Barcelona fell?”

Noam Chomsky, all ten years of him, was in Philadelphia when Barcelona fell. He was so worked up about it that it was the topic of his first published article ... for the student newspaper of the Deweyite progressive school he went to ... a piece in which he denounced Franco as a fascist. His political outlook—anarchism—appears to have been set, fixed forever, at that moment. Or perhaps the word is pre-fixed ... pre-fixed in a shtetl in Russia half a century before he was born. Then, at thirty-eight years old, he laced “The Responsibility of Intellectuals” with so much Marxist lingo that people took him to be part of the

all-around genius, and the genius inflated the solon into a veritable Voltaire, and the veritable Voltaire inflated the genius of all geniuses into a philosophical giant ... Noam Chomsky.

Even in academia it no longer mattered whether one agreed with Chomsky’s scholarly or political opinions or not ... for fame enveloped him like a golden armature.

The superlatives came pouring forth from 1967 on. In 1979 a Sunday *New York Times* review of Chomsky’s *Language and Responsibility* (Paul Robinson’s “The Chomsky Problem”) began: “Judged in terms of the power, range, novelty and influence of his thought, Noam Chomsky is arguably the most important intellectual alive today.” In 1986, in the Arts & Humanities Citation Index, which tracks how often authors are mentioned in other authors’ work, Chomsky came in eighth ... in very fast company ... the first seven were Marx, Lenin, Shakespeare, Aristotle, the Bible, Plato, and Freud. The *Prospect–Foreign Policy* world thinkers poll for 2005 found Chomsky to be the number-one intellectual in the world, with twice the polling numbers of the runner-up (Umberto Eco). In the *New Statesman*’s 2006 “Heroes of Our Time” listings—the heroes being mainly fighters for justice and civil rights who had been imprisoned for the Cause, such as Nelson Mandela, the Nobel Peace Prize winner (1993) who had served twenty-seven years of a life sentence for plotting the violent overthrow of the South African government, and

another Nobel winner, Aung San Suu Kyi, who was under house arrest in Myanmar at the time—Chomsky came in seventh. His arrests were of the token variety that seldom caused the miscreant to miss dinner out. But his status made up for the never-lost time. A *New Yorker* profile of Chomsky in 2003 entitled “The Devil’s Accountant” called him “one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century and one of the most reviled.” In 2010 the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* put him on the

ceaselessly, at an astonishing rate ... 118 books, with titles such as *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (coauthored by Edward S. Herman) ... *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance* ... *Profit over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* ... *Failed States* (very much including the United States): *The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy* ... an average of 1.9 books per year ... 271 articles, at a rate of 4.3 per year ... innumerable speaking engagements, which finally got him out of the building and onto airplanes and before podiums far away.

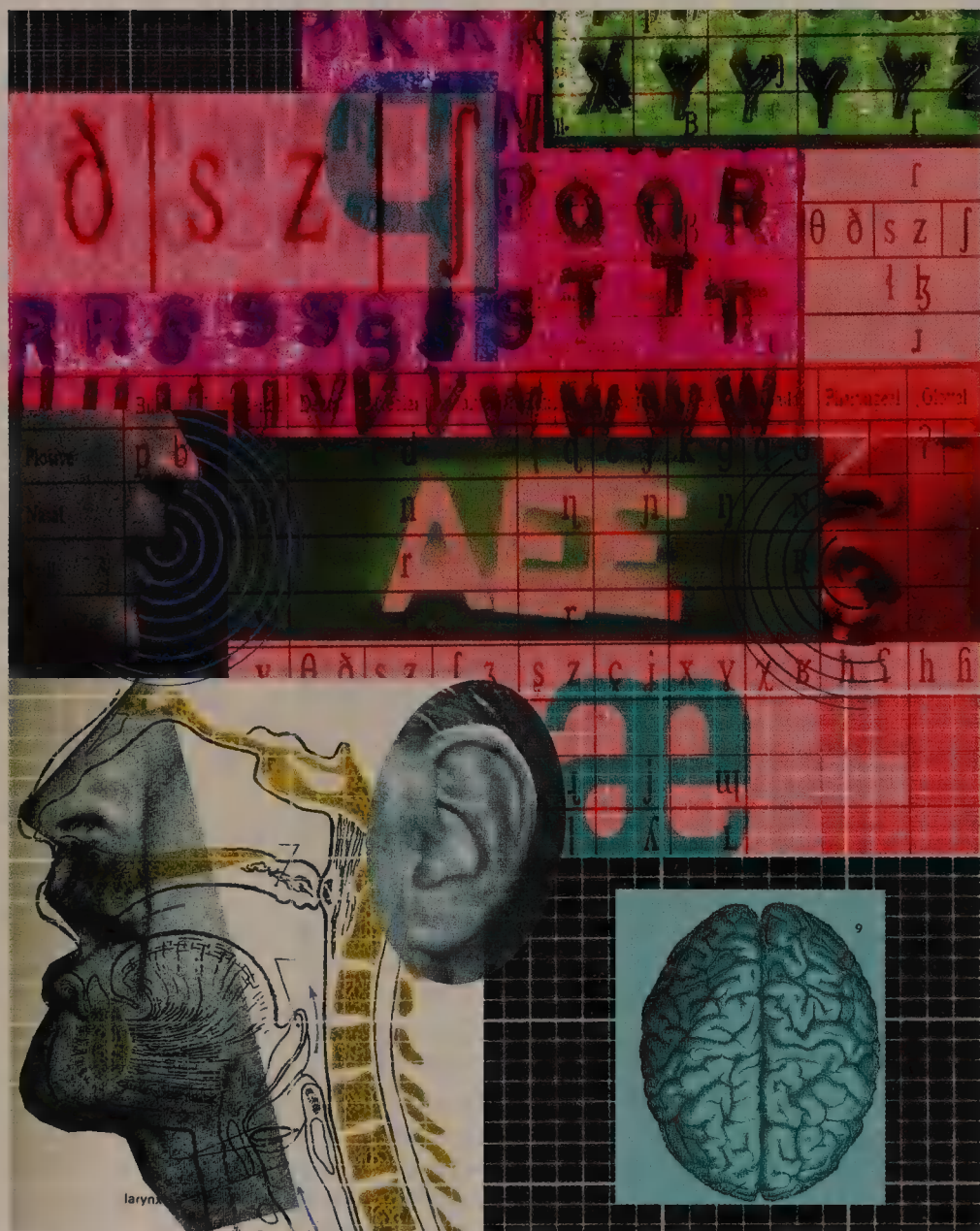
At the same time his output of linguistic papers continued apace, climaxing in 2002 with his and two colleagues’ theory of recursion. Recursion consists, he said, of putting one sentence, one thought, inside another in a series that, theoretically, could be endless. For example, a sentence such as “He assumed that now that her bulbs had burned out, he could shine and achieve the celebrity he had always longed for.” Tucked inside the one thought beginning “He assumed” are four more thoughts, tucked inside one another: “Her bulbs had burned out,” “He could shine,” “He could achieve celebrity,” and “He had always longed for celebrity.” So five thoughts, starting with “He assumed,” are folded and subfolded inside twenty-two words ... *recursion* ... On the face of it, the discovery of recursion was a historic achievement. Every language depended upon recursion—every language. Recursion was *the one capability* that distinguished human thought from all other forms of cognition ... recursion accounted for man’s dominance among all the animals on the globe.

Recursion! ... it was not just a theory, it was a *law!*—just like Newton’s law of gravity. Objects didn’t fall at one speed in most of the world ... but slower in Australia and faster in the Canary Islands. Gravity was a *law* nothing could break. Likewise, recursion! ... it was a newly discovered law of life on earth ... *recursion!* ... it was the sort of thing that could lift one up to a plateau on Olympus alongside Newton, Copernicus, Galileo, Darwin, Einstein—
Noam Chomsky.

By 2005, Noam Chomsky was flying very high. In fact, very high barely says it. The man was ... *in ... orbit*. He had made over an entire field of study in his own likeness. He had discovered and, as linguistics’ reigning authority, decreed the Law of Recur—

roster in their book *The 100 Most Influential Philosophers of All Time*, along with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, Epictetus, St. Thomas Aquinas, Moses Maimonides, David Hume, Schopenhauer, Rousseau, Heidegger, Sartre ... in other words, the greatest minds in the history of the world. This wasn’t fast company, it was a roster of the immortals.

In his new role as an eminence, Chomsky hurled thunderbolts at malefactors down below,



OOOF!—right into the solar plexus!—a 13,000-word article in the August–October 2005 issue of *Current Anthropology* entitled “Cultural Constraints on Grammar and Cognition in Pirahã” by one Daniel L. Everett. Pirahã was apparently a language spoken by several hundred—estimates ranged from 250 to 500—members of a tribe, the Pirahã (pronounced Pee-da-hannh), isolated deep within Brazil’s vast Amazon basin (2,670,000 square miles, about 40 percent of South America’s entire landmass). Ordinarily, Chomsky was bored brainless by all those tiny little languages that old-fashioned flycatchers like Everett were still bringing back from out in “the field.” But this article was an affront aimed straight at him, by name, harping on two points: first, this particular tiny language, Pirahã, had no recursion, none at all, immediately reducing Chomsky’s *law* to just another feature found

of phonetics and phonology when he wrote his fateful paper on the Pirahã’s cultural restraint for *Current Anthropology*.

In his twenty-two years as an off-and-on faculty member, he had written three books and close to seventy articles for learned journals, most of them about his work with the Pirahã. But this was his first bombshell. It was one of the ten most cited articles in *Current Anthropology*’s fifty-plus-year history.

The blast set off no *Ahahhs!* within the field, however. Quite the opposite. Noam Chomsky and his Chomskyites *were* the field. Everett struck them as a clueless outsider who crashes the party of the big thinkers. Look at him! Everett was everything Chomsky wasn’t: a rugged outdoorsman, a hard rider with a thatchy reddish beard and a head of thick thatchy reddish hair. He could have passed for a ranch hand or a West Virginia gas driller. But of course! He

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in most languages; and second, it was the Pirahã’s own distinctive culture, their unique ways of living, that shaped the language—not any “language organ,” not any “universal grammar” or “deep structure” or “language acquisition device” that Chomsky said all languages had in common.

It was unbelievable, this attack!—because Chomsky remembered the author, Daniel L. Everett, very well. At least twenty years earlier, in the 1980s, Everett had been a visiting scholar at MIT after working toward a Sc.D. in linguistics from Brazil’s University of Campinas (Universidade Estadual de Campinas). He was a starstruck Chomskyite at the time.¹ He had an office right across the hall from Chomsky himself. In 1983 Everett received his doctorate from Campinas after writing his dissertation along devout Chomskyan lines, and he didn’t stop there. In 1986 he rewrote the dissertation into a 126-page entry in the *Handbook of Amazonian Languages*. It was very nearly an homage to Chomsky. Now that he had his Sc.D. he took periodic breaks in his work with the Pirahã to teach at Campinas, at the University of Pittsburgh as chairman of the linguistics department, and at the University of Manchester in England, where he was professor

was an old-fashioned flycatcher inexplicably here in the midst of modern air-conditioned armchair linguists with their radiation-bluish computer-screen pallors and faux-manly open shirts. They never left the computer, much less the building. Not to mention Everett’s personal background ... he was from a too small, too remote, too hot—it averaged one hundred degrees from June to September and occasionally hit 115—too dusty, too out-of-it California town called Holtville, way down near the Mexican border. His father was a sometime cowboy and all-the-time souse and roustabout. He and Everett’s mother had gotten married in their teens and broke up when Everett was not yet two years old. When he was eleven, his mother was in a restaurant staggering beneath a tray full of dirty dishes when she collapsed with a crash and died from an aneurysm.

His father returned from time to time and tried to do his best for his son. His “best” consisted of the lessons of life he taught him, such as taking the boy, who was fourteen at the time, to a Mexican whorehouse to lose his virginity ... and then banging on the whore’s door and yelling to his son, “Jesus H. Christ, what’s keeping you?” ... it being *his*, Dad’s, turn next.

Helpless, hopeless, the boy went with the flow into the loose louche lysergic life of teenagers in the 1960s. He had just swallowed some LSD in a Methodist church—wondering what it would be like to experience acid zooms amid the curlicued decorations of the sanctuary—when he came

¹ He was. Everett began his academic career in linguistics as a full-fledged Chomsky acolyte. His earliest work aims to apply the Chomskyan model to Pirahã and make excuses for when it didn’t quite fit. It took years for him to realize that his adherence to Chomskyan beliefs was preventing him from deciphering Pirahã.

upon a beautiful girl named Keren, about his age, with raven hair and ravishing lips. He fell so madly in love—what did it matter that she also had a willpower as blindingly bright and unbending as stainless steel?

She straightened him out very fast. She turned out to be a *real* Methodist. Her mother and father were missionaries. She made a convert out of Everett in no time. Like Everett's own parents, he and Keren got married in their late teens. Keren revved him up to an *evangelical* Methodist, and they resolved to head out into the world as missionaries, like Keren's parents. They underwent several years of intensive linguistic training at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, founded by a popular late-nineteenth-century evangelist, Dwight Moody, and the Summer Institute of Linguistics, headed by a later evangelical Christian, Ken Pike. These were tough, rigorous academies, with no fooling around. The Summer

who had preserved a civilization virtually unchanged for thousands, godknew-how-many thousands, of years.

They spoke only in the present tense. They had virtually no conception of "the future" or "the past," not even words for "tomorrow" and "yesterday," just a word for "other day," which could mean either one. You couldn't call them Stone Age or Bronze Age or Iron Age or any of the Hard Ages because the Ages were all named after the tools prehistoric people made. The Pirahã made none. They were pre-toolers. They had no conception of making something today that they could use "other day," meaning tomorrow in this case. As a result, they made no implements of stone or bone or anything else. They made no artifacts at all—with the exception of the bow and arrow and a scraping tool used to make the arrow. So far no one has been able to figure out how the bow and

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Institute's program included four months of survival training for life in the jungle, among other dangerous terrains, as well as advanced instruction in various tribal tongues. The purpose of the Moody Institute and the SIL, as the Summer Institute of Linguistics was called, was to produce missionaries who could convey to prospective converts the Word—the story of Jesus—in their own languages, anywhere on God's earth.²

Everett had turned out to be such a remarkably adept student, the SIL encouraged him to see what he could do with the Pirahã, a tribe that lived in isolation way up one of the Amazon's nearly 15,000 tributaries, the Maici River. Other missionaries had tried to convert the Pirahã but could never really learn their language, thanks to highly esoteric constructions in grammar, including meaningful glottal stops and shifts in tone, plus a version consisting solely of bird sounds and whistles ... to fool their prey while out hunting.

It took three years, but Everett finally mastered it all, even the bird-word warbling, and became, so far as is known, the only outsider who ever did. Pirahã was a version of the Mura tongue, which seemed to have vanished everywhere else. The Pirahã were isolated geographically. They had no neighbors to threaten them ... or change them. It dawned on Everett that he had come upon a people

arrow—an artifact if there ever was one—became common to the Inuit at the North Pole, the Chinese in East Asia, to the Indians—*er*—Native-born in North America, and the Pirahã in Brazil.

Occasionally, some Pirahã would sling together crude baskets of twigs and leaves. But as soon as they delivered the contents, they'd throw the twigs and leaves away. Likewise ... housing. Only a few domiciles had reached the hut level. The rest were lean-tos of branches and leaves. Palm leaves made the best roofing—until the next strong wind blew the whole thing down. The Pirahã laughed and laughed and flung together another one ... here in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Pirahã was a language with only three vowels (*a*, *o*, *i*) and eight consonants (*p*, *t*, *b*, *g*, *s*, *h*, *k*, and *x*, which is the glottal stop). It was the smallest and leanest language known. The Pirahã were illiterate—not only lexically but also visually. Most could not figure out what they were looking at in two-tone, black-and-white photographs, even when they depicted familiar places and faces. In the Pirahã, Everett could see he had before him the early history of speech and visual deciphering and, miraculously, could study them alive, in the here and now. No such luck with mathematics, however. The Pirahã had none. They had no numbers, not even 1 and 2; only the loose notion of "a little" and "a lot." Money was a mystery to them. They couldn't count and hadn't the vaguest

² The Moody Bible Institute and SIL are still in existence.

idea of what counting was. Every night for eight months—at *their* request—Everett had tried to teach them numbers and counting. They had a suspicion that the Brazilian river traders, who arrived regularly on the Maici, were cheating them. A few young Pirahã seemed to be catching on. They were beginning to do real mathematics. The elders sent them away as soon as they noticed. They couldn't stand children making them look bad. So much for math on the Maici. They had to continue paying the traders with vast quantities of Brazil nuts, which they gathered from the ground in the jungle. They were hunter-gatherers, as the phrase goes, but the hunting didn't do them much good in the river trade. They had no clue about smoking or curing meat.

Because they had little conception of “the past,” the Pirahã also had little conception of history. Everett ran into this problem when he tried to tell them about Jesus.

“How tall is he?” the Pirahã would ask.

Well, *I don't really know, but—*

“Does he have hair like you?” meaning red hair.

I don't know what his hair was like, but—

The Pirahã lost interest in Jesus immediately. He was unreal to them. “Why does our friend Dan keep telling us these Crooked-Head stories?” The Pirahã spoke of themselves as the Straight Heads. Everybody else was a Crooked Head, including Everett and Keren—and how could a Crooked Head possibly improve the thinking of a Straight Head? After about a week of Jesus, one of the Pirahã, Kóhoi, said to Everett politely but firmly, “We like you, Dan, but don't tell us anymore about this Jesus.” Everett paid attention to Kóhoi. Kóhoi had spent hours trying to teach him Pirahã. Neither Everett nor Keren ever converted a single Pirahã. Nobody else ever did, either.

The Pirahã had not only the simplest language on earth but also the simplest culture. They had no leaders, let alone any form of government. They had no social classes. They had no religion. They believed there were bad spirits in the world but had no conception of good ones. They had no rituals or ceremonies at all. They had no music or dance whatsoever. They had no words for colors. To indicate that something was red they would liken it to blood or some berry. They made no jewelry or other bodily ornaments. They did wear necklaces ... lumpy asymmetrical ones intended only to ward off bad spirits. Aesthetics played no part—not

in dress, such as it was; not in hairstyles. In fact, the very notion of *style* was foreign to them.

Here, now, in the flesh, was the type of society that Chomsky considered ideal, namely, *anarchy*, a society perfectly free from all the ranking systems that stratified and stultified modern life. Well ... here it is! Go take a look! If it left at some unlikely hour before dawn, you could catch an American Airlines flight from Logan International Airport, in Boston, to Brasília and from Brasília, a Cessna floatplane to the Maici River ... you could see your dream, *anarchy*, walking ... in the sunset.

Chomsky wasn't even tempted. For a start, it would mean leaving the building and going out into the abominable “field.” But mainly it would be a triumph for Everett and a humiliation for himself, headlined:

Everett to Chomsky:
COME MEET THE TRIBE
THAT KO'D YOUR THEORY



Chomsky never willingly mentioned Everett by name after that, nor did he expound upon the Amazon tribesmen everybody else in linguistics and anthropology was suddenly talking about. He didn't particularly want to hear about the Pirahã lore that so fascinated other

people, such as the way they said good night, which was “Don't sleep—there are snakes.”

And there *were* snakes ... anacondas thirty feet long and weighing five hundred pounds, often lurking near the banks in the shallows of the Maici, capable of coiling themselves around jaguars—and humans—and crushing them and swallowing them whole ... lancehead pit vipers, whose bite injects a hemotoxin that immediately causes blood cells to disintegrate and burst, making it one of the deadliest snakes in the world ... heavy-bodied tree boas that can descend from the branches above and suffocate human beings ... plus various deadly amphibians, insects, and bats ... black caimans, which are gigantic alligators up to twenty feet long with jaws capable of seizing monkeys, wild pigs, dogs, and now and again humans and forcing them underwater to drown them and then, like anacondas, swallowing them whole ... Brazilian wandering spiders, as they are called, if not *the* most venomous spiders on earth, close to it ... golden poison dart frogs—*poisonous frogs!*—swollen with enough venom to kill ten humans ... inch-long cone-nose assassin bugs, also known as kissing bugs because of their habit of biting humans on the face, transmitting Chagas' disease and causing about 12,500 deaths a year ... nocturnal vampire bats that can drink human

blood for as long as thirty minutes at a time while the human victims sleep.

Walking barefoot or in flip-flops at night in Pirahã land was a form of Russian roulette ... and so the Pirahã had learned to be light sleepers. Long middle-of-the-night conversations were not

uncommon, so wary were they throughout the midnight hours.

Whatever else it was, Everett's revelation of life among the Pirahã was sensational news in 2005. He had decided not to publish it in any of the leading linguistics journals. Their circulations were too small. Instead he chose *Current Anthropology*, which was willing to publish the entire article, uncut. That took up a third of the August–October 2005 issue and included eight formal comments solicited from scholars around the world—France, Brazil, Australia, Germany,

life of the species.' The Pirahã's grammar, he argues, comes from their culture, not from any pre-existing mental template."

The *New Scientist* said, "Everett also argues that the Pirahã language is the final nail in the coffin for Noam Chomsky's hugely influential theory of universal grammar. Although this has been modified considerably since its origins in the 1960s, most linguists still hold to its central idea, which is that the human mind has evolved an innate capacity for language and that all languages share certain universal forms that are constrained by the way that we think."

In academia scholars are supposed to think and write at a level far above the excitement of the popular media. But Everett and his Pirahã publicity got so deeply under the scholars' skin, they couldn't stand it any

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the Netherlands, the United States—all of it together totaling 25,000 words. In Everett's case, two of the scholars, Michael Tomasello and Stephen Levinson, were affiliated with the prestigious Max Planck Institute. By no means were their comments—or any others—valentines. They all had their reservations about this and that. So much the better. The big academic presentation paid off. Radio, television, and the popular press picked up on it here and abroad. Germany's biggest and most influential magazine, *Der Spiegel*, said the Pirahã, a "small hunting and gathering tribe, with a population of only 310 to 350, has become the center of a raging debate between linguists, anthropologists and cognitive researchers. Even Noam Chomsky of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Steven Pinker of Harvard University, two of the most influential theorists on the subject, are still arguing over what it means for the study of human language that the Pirahãs don't use subordinate clauses."

The British newspaper the *Independent* zeroed in on recursion. "The Pirahã language has none of [recursion's] features; every sentence stands alone and refers to a single event. ... Professor Everett insists the example of the Pirahã, because of the impact their peculiar culture has had upon their language and way of thinking, strikes a devastating blow to Chomskian theory. 'Hypotheses such as universal grammar are inadequate to account for the Pirahã facts because they assume that language evolution has ceased to be shaped by the social

longer. In 2006, MIT's cognitive science department—not Noam Chomsky's linguistics department—invited Everett to give a lecture about the "cultural factors" that made the Pirahã and their language so exceptional. Three days beforehand, a diatribe appeared on all the Listservs usually reserved for notices about talks to the MIT linguistics community, calling Everett a shameless out-and-out liar who falsifies evidence to support his claims concerning the Pirahã and their language. In fact, says the writer, Everett is so utterly shameless that he had already written about this small Amazonian tribe twenty years earlier in his doctoral dissertation ... and is now blithely and brazenly contradicting himself whenever he feels like it. I'm publishing all this ahead of time, says the writer, for fear I and others who see through Everett's scam will be "cut off" if we try to expose him at the event itself. In his peroration he says, eyeteeth oozing with irony:

"You, too, can enjoy the spotlight of mass media and closet exoticists! Just find a remote tribe and exploit them for your own fame by making claims nobody will bother to check!" It turned out to be by Andrew Nevins, a young, newly hired linguist at Harvard. He couldn't hold it in any longer!

Nobody in the used-to-be-seemly field of linguistics or any other discipline had ever seen a performance like this before.

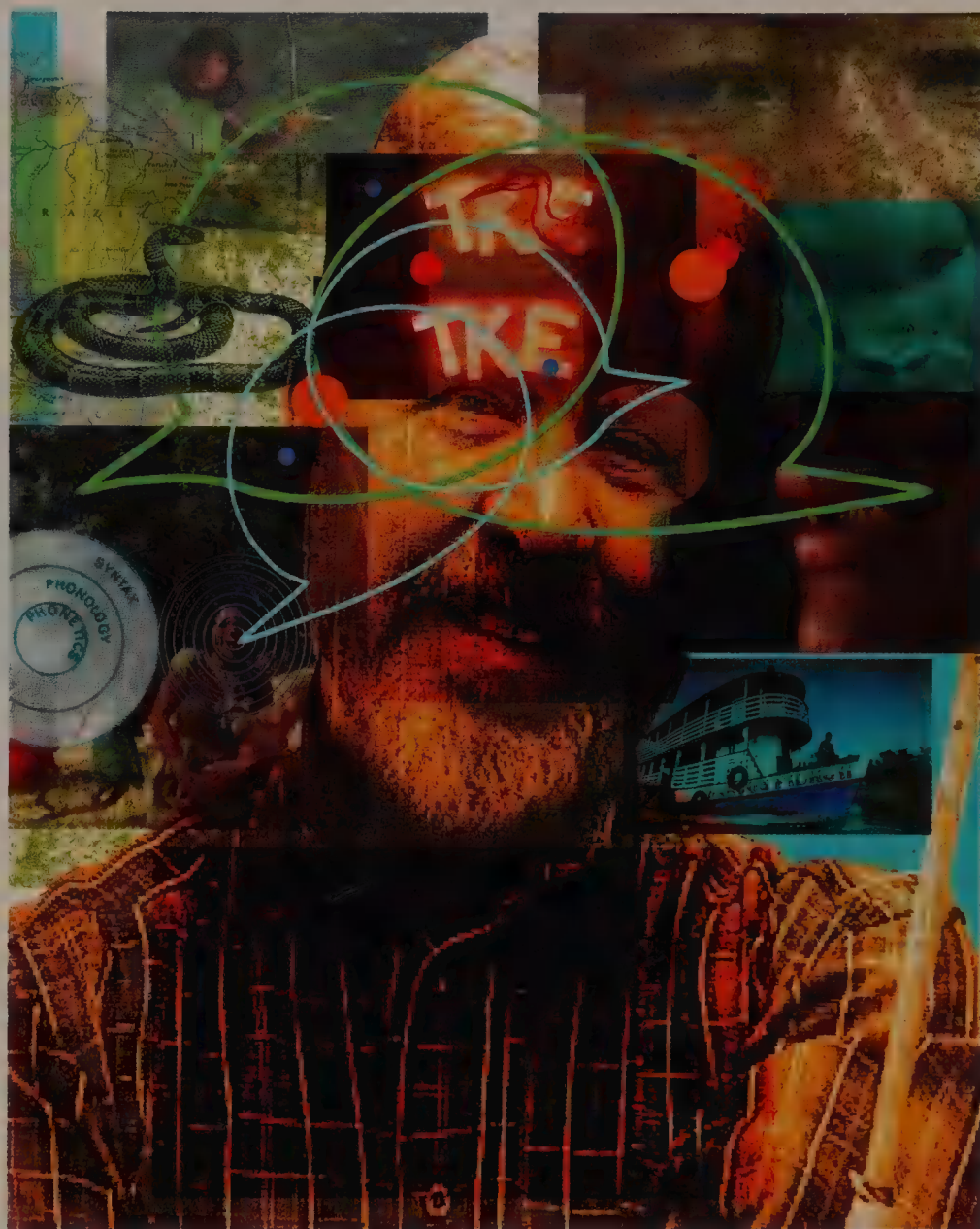
Nevins was at work with two other linguists, David Pesetsky and Cilene Rodrigues, on an article so long—31,000 words—that it was the

equivalent of over 110 pages in a dense, scholarly book. They fought Everett point by point, no matter how dot-size the point. The aim, obviously, was to carpet bomb, obliterate, every syllable Everett had to say about this miserable little tribe he claimed he had found somewhere in the depths of Brazil's Amazon basin. It appeared online as "Pirahã Exceptionality: a Reassessment," by "Andrew Nevins (Harvard), David Pesetsky (MIT), and Cilene Rodrigues (Universidade Estadual de Campinas)" ... three linguists from three different universities, Pesetsky pointed out ... *hmmm* ... a bit ... disingenuously ... because put them all together ... they spelled CHOMSKY (MIT). Chomsky had been David Pesetsky's dissertation supervisor when Pesetsky got his doctoral degree at MIT in 1983. Five years later he returned as Chomsky's junior colleague on the linguistics faculty. Chomsky's close friend Morris Halle, the MIT linguist who back in 1955 had played a major role in bringing him to MIT in the first place, became the dissertation supervisor to Andrew Nevins. Nevins was an MIT lifer. He had enrolled as a freshman in 1996 and had been there for nine years by the time he received his Ph.D. in 2004 ... and married Cilene Rodrigues, a Brazilian linguist who had been a visiting scholar at MIT for several years. What they wrote, "Pirahã Exceptionality: a Reassessment," couldn't have seemed more of a Chomsky production had he put his byline on it.

The problem was, it had taken the truth squad, namely, Nevins, Pesetsky, and Rodrigues, all of 2006 to assemble this prodigious weapon. They planned to submit it to the biggest and most influential linguistics journal, *Language*, but it could easily take another six or eight months for *Language* to put it through their meticulous review process. So the trio first decided to post it online on LingBuzz, a linguistics article-sharing site with a large Chomsky following. Their behemoth doomsday rebuttal appeared there on March 8, 2007—

—and keeled over thirty-nine days later, April 16. On that day, *The New Yorker* published a 13,000-word piece about Everett entitled "The Interpreter: Has a remote Amazonian tribe upended our understanding of language?" by John Colapinto, with a subhead reading "Dan Everett believes that Pirahã undermines Noam Chomsky's idea of a universal grammar." The magazine had sent the writer, Colapinto, down to the Amazon basin with Everett.

In his opening paragraph Colapinto describes how he and Everett arrived on the Maici in a Cessna floatplane. Up on the riverbank were about thirty Pirahã. They greeted him with what "sounded like a profusion of exotic songbirds, a melodic chattering scarcely discernible, to the uninitiated, as human speech." Colapinto's richest moment came



when the linguist W. Tecumseh Fitch arrived. Fitch was a reverent Chomskyite. He had collaborated with Chomsky and Marc Hauser in writing the 2002 article proclaiming Chomsky's discovery that recursion was the very essence of human language. Fitch wanted to see the Pirahã for himself, and Everett had said come right ahead. Fitch had devised a test by which he somehow—it was all highly esoteric and superscientific—could detect whether a person was using "context-free grammar" by filming his eye movements while a cartoon monkey moved this way and that on a computer screen,

accompanied by simple audio cues. He was absolutely sure the Pirahã would pass the test. "They're going to get this basic pattern. The Pirahã are humans—humans can do this."

Fitch was very open about why he had come all the way from Scotland into the very bowels of the Amazon basin: to prove that, like everybody else, the Pirahã used recursion. At the University of St. Andrews he had left the building a few times to do fieldwork on animal behavior, but never for anything even remotely like this: to study an alien tribe of human beings he had never heard of before ... well beyond the boundary line of civilization, law and order, in the rainforests of Brazil's wild northwest.

With Everett's help he set up a site for his experiments, complete with video and audio equipment. The first subject was a muscular Pirahã with a bowl-shaped haircut. He did nothing but look at the floating monkey head. He ignored the audio cues.

"It didn't look like he was doing premonitory looking," i.e., trying to sense what the monkey might do, Fitch said to Everett. "Maybe ask him to point to where he thinks the monkey is going to go."

"They don't point," Everett said. And they don't have words for "left" or "right" or "over there" or any other direction. You can't tell them to go up or down; you have to say something concrete such as "up the river" or "down the river." So Everett asked the man if the monkey was going upriver or downriver.

The man said, "Monkeys go to the jungle."

Fitch has been described as a "tall, patrician man," very much the old Ivy League sort. His full name is William Tecumseh Sherman Fitch III. He is a direct descendant of William Tecumseh Sherman, the famous Civil War general. But now with Everett in the Amazon basin, he was sweating, and his brow was beginning to fold into rivulets between his eyebrows and on either side of his nose. He ran the test again. After several abortive tries, Fitch's voice took on "a rising note of panic, 'If they fail in the recursion one—it's not recursion; I've got to stop saying that. I mean embedding. Because, I mean, if he can't get this—'"

In the Amazon basin, the tall patrician is reduced to ejaculations such as "Fuck! If I'd had a joystick for him to *hunt* the monkey!"

The *New Yorker* piece made Chomsky furious. It threw him and his followers into full combat mode. He had turned down Colapinto's request for an interview, apparently to position himself as aloof from his challenger. He and Everett were

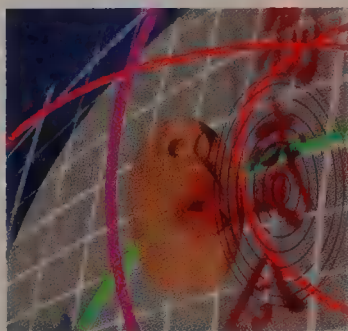
not on the same plane. But now the whole accursed world was reading *The New Yorker*. Dan Everett, *The New Yorker* called him, Dan, not Daniel L. Everett ... in the magazine's eyes he was an instant folk hero ... Little Dan standing up to daunting Dictator Chomsky.

In the heading of the article was a photograph, reprinted many times since, of Everett submerged up to his neck in the Maici River. Only his smiling face is visible. Right near him but above him is a thirty-five-or-so-year-old Pirahã sitting in a canoe in his gym shorts. It became the image that distinguished Everett from Chomsky. Immersed!—up to his very neck, Everett is ... immersed in the lives of a tribe of hitherto unknown Na—er—indigenous peoples in the Amazon's uncivilized northwest. No linguist could help but contrast that with everybody's mental picture of Chomsky sitting up high, very high, in an armchair in an air-conditioned office at MIT, spic-and-span ... he never looks down, only inward. He never leaves the building except to go to the airport to fly to other campuses to receive honorary degrees ... more than forty at last count ... and remain unmuddled by the Maici or any of the other muck of life down below.

Not that Everett in any way superseded Chomsky. He was far too roundly resented for that. He was telling academics that they had wasted half a century by subscribing to Chomsky's doctrine of Universal Grammar. Languages might appear wildly different from one another on the surface, Chomsky had taught, but down deep all shared the same structure and worked the same way. Abandoning that Chomskyan first principle would not come easily.

That much was perhaps predictable. But by now, the early twenty-first century, the vast majority of people who thought of themselves as intellectuals were atheists. Believers were regarded as something slightly worse than hapless fools. And the lowest breed of believers was the evangelical white Believer. There you had Daniel Everett. True, he had converted from Christianity to anthropology in the early 1980s—but his not merely evangelical but missionary past was a stain that would never fade away completely ... not in academia.

Even before the term "political correctness" entered the language, linguists and anthropologists were careful not to characterize any—er—indigenous peoples as crude or simple-minded or inferior in any way. Everett was careful and a half. He had come upon the sim-



plest society in the known world. The Pirahã thought only in the present tense. They had a limited language; it had no recursion, which would have enabled it to stretch on endlessly in any direction and into any time frame. They had no artifacts except for those bows and arrows. Everett bent over backwards to keep the Pirahã from sounding the least bit crude or simpleminded. Their language had its limits—but it had a certain profound richness, he said. It was the most difficult language in the world to learn—but such was the price of complexity, he said. Everett expressed nothing but admiration when it came to the Pirahã. But by this time, the early twenty-first century, even giving the vaguest hint that you looked upon some—*er*—indigenous peoples as stone simple was no longer elitist. The word, by 2007, was “racist.” And racist had become hard tar to remove.

“Pirahã Exceptionality: a Reassessment,”
seemed far enough along to make *Language*’s
June 2009 issue—

—Everett executed a *coup de scoop*.

In November of 2008, a full seven months before the truth squad’s scheduled hecatomb time for Everett, he, the scheduled mark, did a stunning thing. He maintained his mad pace and beat them into print—with one of the handful of popular books ever written on linguistics: *Don’t Sleep, There Are Snakes*, an account of his and his family’s thirty years with the Pirahã. It was dead serious in an academic sense. He loaded it with scholarly linguistic and anthropological reports of his findings in the Amazon. He left academics blinking ... and nonacademics with eyes wide open, staring. The book broke free of its scholarly binding right away.

THERE WERE MORE IMMEDIATE WAYS TO DIE IN THE RAINFORESTS THAN
ANYONE WHO HAD NEVER LIVED THERE COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE. THE CONSTANT
THREAT OF DEATH GAVE EVEN EVERETT’S OBSERVATIONS A GRISLY EDGE

Racist ... out of that came the modern equivalent of the Roman Inquisition’s declaring Galileo “vehemently suspect of heresy” and placing him under house arrest for the last eight years of his life, making it impossible for him to continue his study of the universe. But the Inquisition was at least wide open about what it was doing. In Everett’s case, putting an end to his life’s work was a clandestine operation. Not long after Colapinto’s *New Yorker* article appeared, Everett was in the United States teaching at Illinois State University when he got a call from a canary with a Ph.D. informing him that a Brazilian government agency known as FUNAI, the Portuguese acronym for the National Indian Foundation, was denying him permission to return to the Pirahã ... on the grounds that what he had written about them was ... racist. He was dumbfounded.

Now he was convinced that the truth squad was waging outright war. He began writing a counterattack faster than he had ever written anything in his life. He didn’t know, but wouldn’t have been surprised to learn, that Nevins, Pesetsky, and Rodrigues were already at work, converting their online carpet bomb on LingBuzz into a veritable hecatomb to run in *Language* and snuff out Everett’s heresy once and for all.

There was no rushing *Language*’s editors, however. They found the piece too long. By the time the squad rewrote the piece ... and *Language*, never in a hurry, edited it ... and the article, bearing the old LingBuzz title,

Margaret Mead had her adventures among the Samoans, and Bronislaw Malinowski had his among the Trobriand Islanders. But Everett’s adventures among the Pirahã kept blowing up into situations too deadly to be written off as “adventures.”

There were more immediate ways to die in the rainforests than anyone who had never lived there could possibly imagine. The constant threat of death gave even Everett’s scholarly observations a grisly edge ... especially compared to those of linguists who never left their aerated offices in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In the rainforests, mosquitoes transmitting dengue fever, yellow fever, chikungunya, and malaria rose up by the cloudful from dusk to dawn, as numerous as the oxygen atoms they flew through, or so it felt. No matter what precautions you took, if you lived there for three months or more, you were guaranteed infection by mosquitoes penetrating your skin with their proboscises’ forty-seven cutting edges, first injecting their saliva to prevent the puncture from clotting and then drinking your blood at their leisure. The saliva causes the itching that follows.

Don’t Sleep, There Are Snakes instantly became a hit and the biggest wallop in the breadbasket Noam Chomsky’s hegemony had ever suffered. Everett didn’t so much attack Chomsky’s theory as dismiss it. He spoke of Chomsky’s waning influence and the mounting evidence that Chomsky was wrong when he

called language “innate.” Language had not evolved from ... *anything*. It was an artifact. Just as man had taken natural materials, namely, wood and metal, and combined them to create the axe, he had taken natural sounds and put them together in the form of codes representing objects, actions, and, ultimately, thoughts and calculations—and called the codes *words*. In *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes*, Everett animates his avant-garde theory with the story of his own thirty years with the Pirahã ... risking death in virtually every conceivable form in the jungle, from malaria to murder to poison to getting swallowed by anacondas.

National Public Radio read great swaths of the book aloud over their national network and named it one of the best books of the year. Reviews in the popular press were uniformly favorable, even glowing ... to the point of blinding ... as in the *Sacramento Book Review*: “A genuine and engrossing book that is both sharp and intuitive; it closes around you and reaches inside you, controlling your every thought and movement as you read it.” It is “impossible to forget.”

Ideally, great wide-eyed romantic acclaim like this should have no effect, except perhaps a negative one, in academia. But when the truth squad's 30,000-word “reassessment” finally came out in *Language*, in June of 2009, there was no explosion. The Great Rebuttal just lay there, a swollen corpus of objections—cosmic, small-minded, and everything in between. It didn't make a sound. The success of *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes* had defused it.

Chomsky and the squad were far from done for, however. They concentrated on the academic press. No academic, in what was still the Age of Chomsky, was likely to write any gushing review of Everett's scarlet book. Chomsky and the squad were on the *qui vive* for anyone who stepped out of line. A professor of philosophy at King's College London, David Papineau, wrote a more or less positive review of *Don't Sleep*—only that: “more or less”—and a member of the truth squad, David Pesetsky, put him in his place. Papineau didn't take this as good-hearted collegial advice. “For people outside of linguistics,” he said, “it's rather surprising to find this kind of protection of orthodoxy.”

Three months after *Don't Sleep* was published, Chomsky dismissed Everett to the outer darkness with one of his favorite epithets. In an interview with *Folha de S. Paulo*, Brazil's biggest and most influential newspaper, news website, and mobile news service, Chomsky said Everett “has turned into a charlatan.” A charlatan is a fraud who specializes in showing off knowledge he doesn't have. The epithets (“fraud,” “liar,” “charlatan”) were Chomsky's way of sentencing opponents to Oblivion. From now on Everett wouldn't rate the effort it would take to denounce him.

Everett had, as it says in the song, let the dogs out. Linguists who had kept their doubts and grumbles to themselves were now emboldened to speak out openly.

Michael Tomasello, a psychologist who was co-director of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology and one of the scholars who commented on Everett's 2005 article in *Current Anthropology*, had been critical of this and that in Chomsky's theory for several years. But in 2009, after Everett's book was published, he went all out in a paper entitled “Universal Grammar Is Dead” for the journal *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* and confronted Chomsky head-on: “The idea of a biologically evolved, universal grammar with linguistic content is a myth.” “Myth” became the new word. Vyvyan Evans of Wales's Bangor University expanded it into a book, *The Language Myth*, in 2014. He came right out and rejected Chomsky's and Steven Pinker's idea of an innate, natural-born “language instinct.” In a blurb, Michael Fortescue of the University of Copenhagen added, “Evans' rebuttal of Chomsky's Universal Grammar from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics provides an excellent antidote to popular textbooks where it is assumed that the Chomskyan approach to linguistic theory ... has somehow been vindicated once and for all.”

Thanks to Everett, linguists were beginning to breathe life into the words of the anti-Chomskyans of the twentieth century who had been written off as cranks or contrarians, such as Larry Trask, a linguist at England's University of Sussex. In 2003, the year after Chomsky announced his Law of Recursion, Trask said in an interview, “I have no time for Chomskyan theorizing and its associated dogmas of ‘universal grammar.’ This stuff is so much half-baked twaddle, more akin to a religious movement than to a scholarly enterprise. I am confident that our successors will look back on UG as a huge waste of time. I deeply regret the fact that this sludge attracts so much attention outside linguistics, so much so that many non-linguists believe that Chomskyan theory simply is linguistics ... and that UG is now an established piece of truth, beyond criticism or discussion. The truth is entirely otherwise.”

In 2012 Everett published *Language: The Cultural Tool*, a book spelling out in scholarly detail the linguistic material he had tucked in amid the tales of death-dodging in *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes* ... namely, that speech, language, is not something that had evolved in *Homo sapi-*

ens, the way the breed's unique small-motor-skilled hands had ... or its next-to-hairless body. Speech is man-made. It is an artifact ... and it explains man's power over all other creatures in a way Evolution all by itself can't begin to.

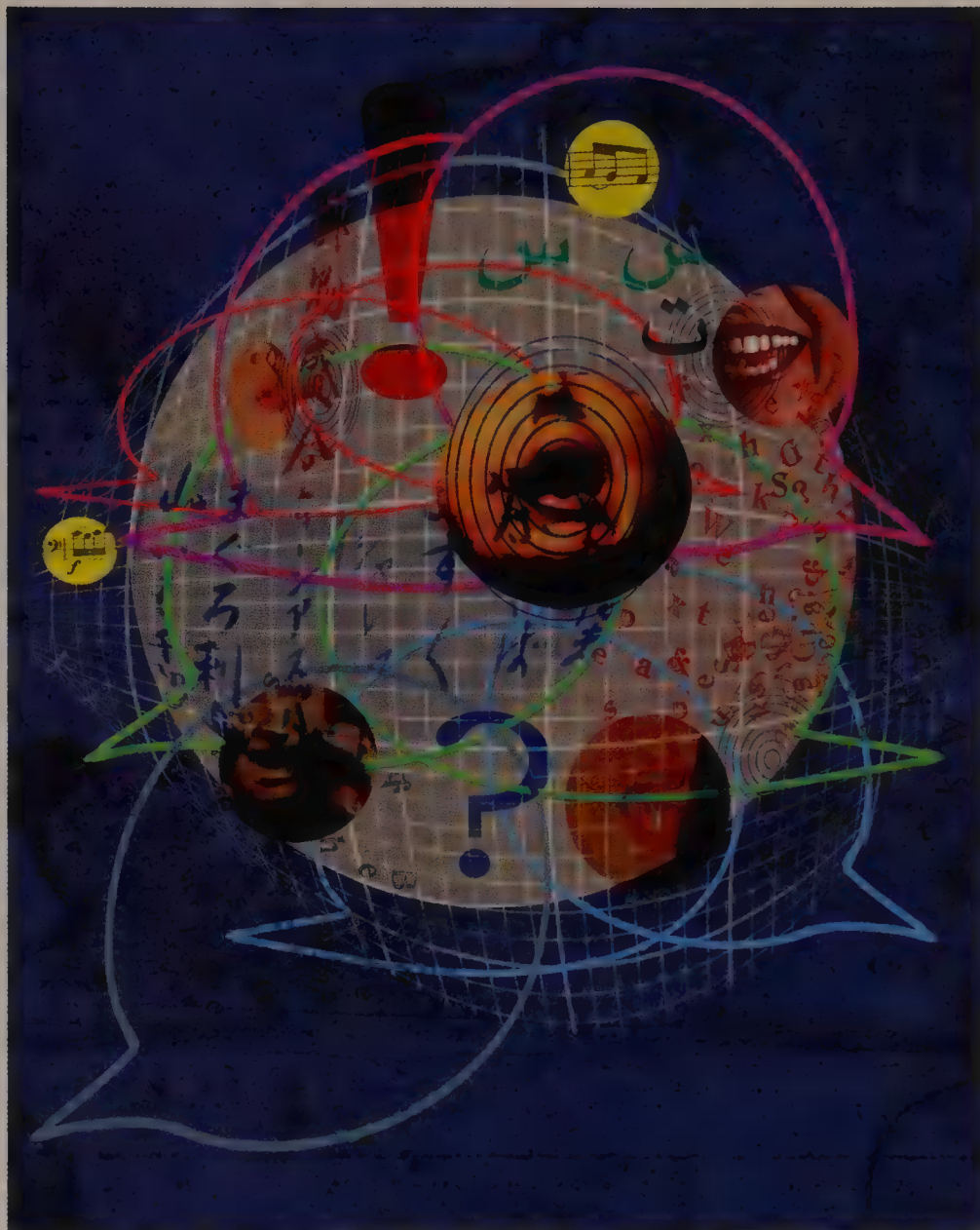
Language: The Cultural Tool was Everett's *Origin of Species*, his *Philosophiae Naturalis* ... and it wasn't nearly the success that *Don't Sleep* had been. It went light on the autobiographical storytelling ... Oh, the book had its moments ... Only Everett had it in him to make direct fun of Chomsky ... He tells a story about visiting MIT in the early 1990s and going to what was billed as a major Chomsky lecture. "A group of his students were sitting in the back giggling," says Everett. "When Chomsky mentioned the Martian linguist example, they could barely constrain their chuckles and I saw money changing hands." After the talk, he asked them what that was all about, and they said they had bets with each other on exactly when in his lecture Chomsky would drop his moldy old Martian linguist on everybody.

Critics such as Tomasello and Vyvyan Evans, as well as Everett, had begun to have their doubts about Chomsky's UG. Where did that leave the rest of his anatomy of speech? After all, he was very firm in his insistence that it was a physical structure. Somewhere in the brain the *language organ* was actually pumping the UG through the *deep structure* so that the LAD, the *language acquisition device*, could make language, speech, audible, visible, the absolutely real product of *Homo sapiens*'s central nervous system.

And Chomsky's reaction? As always, Chomsky proved to be unbeatable when it came to debate. He never let himself be backed into a corner, where he could be forced to have it out with his attackers jowl to howl. He either jumped out ahead of them and up above them or so artfully dodged them that they were left staggering off stride. Tomasello had closed in and just about had him on all this far-fetched para-anatomy, when suddenly—

—shazzzzammm—Chomsky's language organ and all its para-anatomy, if that was what it was, disappeared, as if it had never been there in the first place. He never recanted a word. He merely subsumed the same concepts beneath a new and broader body of thought. Gone, too, astonishingly, was recursion. *Recursion!* In 2002 Chomsky had announced his discovery of recursion and pronounced it *the essential element of human speech*. But here, in the summer of 2013, when he appeared before the Linguistic Society

of America's Linguistic Institute at the University of Michigan ... recursion had vanished, too. So where did that leave Everett and his remarks on recursion? Where? Nowhere. Recursion was no longer an issue ... and Everett didn't exist anymore. He was a ghost, a vaporized nonperson. Naturally, the truth squad could no longer



see him, either. They couldn't have cared less about churning up an angry wave for *Language: The Cultural Tool* to come surfing in on. They didn't even extend Everett the courtesy of loathing him in print. They left non-him behind with all the rest of history's roadside trash.

The passage of time did not mollify Chomsky's opinion of the non-him, Everett, in the slightest. In 2016, when I pressed him on the point, Chomsky blew off Everett like a nonentity to the minus-second power.

"It"—Everett's opinion; he does not refer to Everett by name—"amounts to absolutely nothing, which is why linguists pay no attention to it.

He claims, probably incorrectly, it doesn't matter whether the facts are right or not. I mean, even accepting his claims about the language in question—Pirahã—tells us nothing about these topics. The speakers of this language, Pirahã speakers, easily learn Portuguese, which has all the properties of normal languages, and they learn it just as easily as any other child does, which means they have the same language capacity as anyone else does."

As a result, Everett's new book didn't begin to kick up the ruckus that *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes* had. An entirely new world had been born in linguistics. In effect, Chomsky was announcing—without so much as a quick look back over his shoulder—"Welcome to the Strong Minimalist Thesis, Hierarchically Structured Expression, and Merge." A regular syllablavalanche had buried the language organ and the body parts that came with it.

Starting in the 1950s, said Chomsky, whose own career had started in the 1950s, "there's been a huge explosion of inquiry into language.... Far more penetrating work is going on into a vastly greater array of theoretical issues.... Many new topics have been opened. The questions that students are working on today could not even be formulated or even imagined half a century ago or, for that matter, much more recently...." They are "considering more seriously the most fundamental question about language, namely, what is it." *What is it?* With the help of "the formal sciences," said Chomsky, we can take on "the most basic property of language, namely, that each language provides an unbounded array" of (Chomsky loved "array") "hierarchically structured expressions ... through some rather obscure system of thought that we know is there but we don't know much about it."

In August of 2014, Chomsky teamed up with three colleagues, Johan J. Bolhuis, Robert C. Berwick, and Ian Tattersall, to publish an article for the journal *PLoS Biology* with the title "How Could Language Have Evolved?" After an invocation of the Strong Minimalist Thesis and the Hierarchical Syntactic Structure, Chomsky and his new trio declare, "It is uncontroversial that language has evolved, just like any other trait of living organisms." Nothing else in the article is anywhere nearly so set in concrete. Chomsky *et alii* note it was commonly assumed that language was created primarily for communication ... *but ...* in fact communication is an all but irrelevant, by-the-way use of language ... language is deeper than that; it is a

"particular computational cognitive system, implemented neurally" ... there is the proposition that Neanderthals could speak ... *but ...* there is no proof ... we know anatomically that the Neanderthals' hyoid bone in the throat, essential for *Homo sapiens*'s speech, was in the right place ... *but ...* "hyoid morphology, like most other lines of evidence, is evidently no silver bullet for determining when human language originated" ... Chomsky and the trio go over aspect after aspect of language ... *but ...* there is something wrong with every hypothesis ... they try to be all-encompassing ... *but ...* in the end any attentive soul reading it realizes that all 5,000 words were summed up in the very first eleven words of the piece, which read:

"The evolution of the faculty of language largely remains an enigma."

An enigma! A century and a half's worth of certified wise men, if we make Darwin the starting point—or of bearers of doctoral degrees, in any case—six generations of them had devoted their careers to explaining exactly what language is. After all that time and cerebration they had arrived at a conclusion: language is ... *an enigma*? Chomsky all by himself had spent sixty years on the subject. He had convinced not only academia but also an awed public that he had the answer. And now he was a signatory of a declaration that language remains ... *an enigma*?

"Little enough is known about cognitive systems and their neurological basis," Chomsky had said to John Gliedman back in 1983. "But it does seem that the representation and use of language involve specific neural structures, though their nature is not well understood."

It was just a matter of time, he intimated then, until empirical research would substantiate his analogies. That was thirty years ago. So in thirty years, Chomsky had advanced from "specific neural structures, though their nature is not well understood" to "some rather obscure system of thought that we know is there but we don't know much about."

In three decades nobody had turned up any hard evidence to support Chomsky's conviction that every person is born with an innate, gene-driven power of speech with the motor running. But so what? Chomsky had made the most ambitious attempt since Aristotle's in 350 B.C. to explain what exactly language is. And no one else in human history had come even close. It was dazzling in its own flailing way—this age-old, unending, utter, ultimate, universal display of ignorance concerning man's most important single gift. ■

FOUR IN VERSE

By John Ashbery
Introduction by Ben Lerner

Many of John Ashbery's recent poems are full of sayings and parables and clichés—but from what culture, what country? The world of these poems resembles ours: there are ball games and movies and suburbs and Jesus. But while Ashbery's language often feels well-worn ("Do not fear the gulches/asleep on the farm"; "Be ready to hug your glass star"), it's hard to say who exactly wore it, and why. This mixture of familiarity and foreignness is at once funny and profound—many of the formulations are ridiculous, and yet it's as though Ashbery has invented an Esperanto through which we have access to the kitsch of all possible worlds. We hear, as if for the millionth time, what we have never heard before.

John Ashbery's writing has always been in an important sense about time (what poetry isn't?), but the recent poems take up lateness—"life is a short short story"; "the gargantuan sales are over"; "we all had had enough/of it in our youth"—in a variety of ways. The magnificent "Commotion of the Birds," the title poem of Ashbery's collection in progress, looks back from "today's glare" at several centuries of artistic innovation and transmission, managing at once to be a send-up of academic and artistic periods and their beautiful distillation. I think it ranks with his best poetry, but who cares about the rankings: if, at eighty-nine, Ashbery is looking back, it's from ahead of us.

WHATEVER THE OLD MAN DOES IS ALWAYS RIGHT

I

First of all, you aren't telling me the whole story.

Friday saw armpit futures rise across the country.
It is an acknowledged truth that you and your little brother
sidled across a city of two million souls.
Well, and were we supposed to forget it?
That's not the way the soul functions in today's suburbia.

We'll have no more of that, nor go a-roving.

II

All cabbages and cukes are on sale.
That's because there was a rumor of shortages

in the flanks of winter, before we were on the scene
or were of a responsible age. Sure enough, other young adults
will take our place at the helm. Sure, a bitter pill,
multiple corn dogs, and I ask you. Already Fred Flintstone
was having second thoughts. They arrived in the form of tremendous
cloud barriers, rendering all other life sterile
and attractive. Two more is all you get after we're outta here.
You saved us once. This is the result, and our resolve.

III

I saw it and no one believed me. The old man wept quietly.

IV

And there was further loose talk in Maida Vale re the kind
of outsiders you can expect now that the yeoman class is finished.
And lo, one went out from them. "Intuit me, Jesus." And then
the other classes stayed put a certain time before they too set out,
having no permanent idea of the future. Sure enough, supplies
arrived. And were put to good use. But still it was time for more.

V

The old man wouldn't hear of it. Said we all had had enough
of it in our youth, were spoiled rotten. Wait, where's
the evidence of that? If I'm spoiled so be it, but at least let
the aroma of charming decay play over the surfaces. Color me shitfaced
if you must, but repay my obloquy in bright coin.
Otherwise the aims and achievements of one side
will always be parallel to the other, and now I bid you good night.
Thus the score was tallied, heavily.

List to all his energy being pulled.
Alarm is a form of handwriting this time. Wash your basement.
This is him doing a moose soup.

VI

Thy tines, thy sediment, swizzling health
that she and a girlfriend grew
of aryan certainty and cockeyed pride, all have been
scratched. I make a 39 percent commission
on our magic spatula,
driving it on four cylinders to the dump.

On the superseded golf course
cherries with Brenda. O their hearts are fantastically gay.
I will.

VII

In Crispy Town
swamp butter, what became our lips,
dear boy ... old chap, smuggle I mean snuggle
a thank-you note
or my all-night interview, for that matter.
I wonder if my dad's disk can matter
and yes, she didn't write poems
and wanted to check on me.

How could anyone?
 I'd love to see—don't give me that.
 Dressed to—I can't complain kinky forests, tenuous.
 Look at them and decide which one.

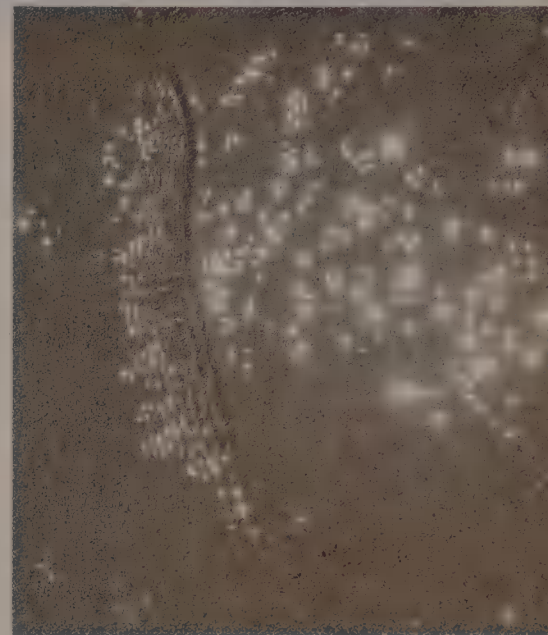
Unhappy lumberings in the heart. Tom is ready.
 The jerk remedy is working.
 You dropped something.
 It must have been important, they say.

And girls' volleyball
 of six dozen years, as smooth a warranty
 as you're likely to snag,
 that can blow up suddenly,
 a little bit more poignant
 to my older sister

straight into the Atlantic.

What is your foot exactly?
 Flummoxed ...
 the makeshift western quarter
 and I wish I could devalue you a currency.

Where do I first blurt him out?



COMMOTION OF THE BIRDS

We're moving right along through the seventeenth century.
 The latter part is fine, much more modern
 than the earlier part. Now we have Restoration Comedy.
 Webster and Shakespeare and Corneille were fine
 for their time but not modern enough,
 though an improvement over the sixteenth century
 of Henry VIII, Lassus and Petrus Christus, who, paradoxically,
 seem more modern than their immediate successors,
 Tyndale, Moroni, and Luca Marenzio among them.
 Often it's a question of seeming rather than being modern.
 Seeming is almost as good as being, sometimes,
 and occasionally just as good. Whether it can ever be better
 is a question best left to philosophers
 and others of their ilk, who know things
 in a way others cannot, even though the things
 are often almost the same as the things we know.
 We know, for instance, how Carissimi influenced Charpentier,
 measured propositions with a loop at the end of them
 that brings things back to the beginning, only a little
 higher up. The loop is Italian,
 imported to the court of France and first despised,
 then accepted without any acknowledgment of where

it came from, as the French are wont to do.
 It may be that some recognize it
 in its new guise—that can be put off
 till another century, when historians
 will claim it all happened normally, as a result of history.
 (The baroque has a way of tumbling out at us
 when we thought it had been safely stowed away.
 The classical ignores it, or doesn't mind too much.
 It has other things on its mind, of lesser import,
 it turns out.) Still, we are right to grow with it,
 looking forward impatiently to modernism, when
 everything will work out for the better, somehow.
 Until then it's better to indulge our tastes
 in whatever feels right for them: this shoe,
 that strap, will come to seem useful one day
 when modernism's thoughtful presence is installed
 all around, like the remnants of a construction project.
 It's good to be modern if you can stand it.
 It's like being left out in the rain, and coming
 to understand that you were always this way: modern,
 wet, abandoned, though with that special intuition
 that makes you realize you weren't meant to be
 somebody else, for whom the makers
 of modernism will stand inspection
 even as they wither and fade in today's glare.

FEATURETTE

Do not fear the gulches
asleep on the farm. It didn't die like that.

Don't go buying anything
and go do something. And very tired, dog-tired,
sometimes I think we were better off
before all the new inventions—the trompe-l'oeil fried egg,
the American flea. I didn't die like that.

This is how we usually
yes it is too like that

get it on ...
Much of this has little to do
with how we shaved and behaved,
or mixed doubles.

You're right, the gargantuan sales are over.
I guess my question (a humble bricklayer) is
kiss it and make it go away; the comedy-on-the-train operetta,
a huge success when it opened in Shanghai,
sewn right-leg to right-leg.
Life is a short short story
with explosive simmering.

Who else d'ya like in poetry?
We didn't have time for lunch.
Be ready to hug your glass star.
I'd advise you to.
Are you scorpion enough to even try?
No-good green parents accrue in fives.
He doesn't want to do it himself, then
beautiful, and happy
under a coat of vanish, er, varnish.
(Not in pharmacies) it went viral.

BUT SERIOUSLY

Do not include anger at the distance
it takes to get from here to the hill of downtown
that bears the sapphire tower.
Others than you have made the trip, and found
little to marvel at once the arriving was over.

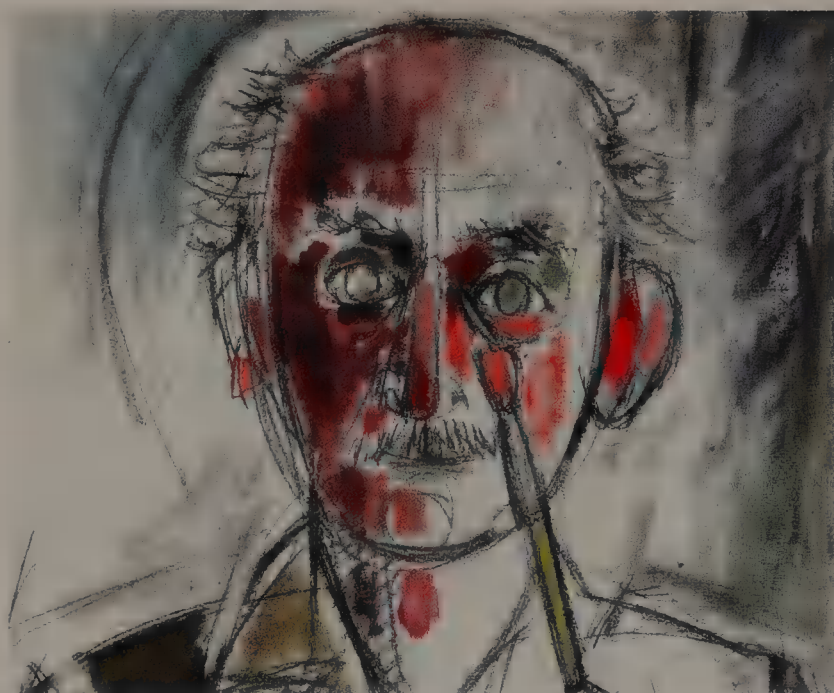
Your words hold too much meaning once
they're released. Save an epigram
for the jar. Once it is lapsed
you'll wear it like an endorsement,
jewel that goes nowhere.

All along the creek where we once stood
new ball games are being absorbed
and declassified. Does that matter to us?
Or is it already time to go back in?
On the Waterfront was a good movie. Can we leave it at that?

A SIGH AND A SALUTE

An appreciation of Si Lewen and his Parade

By Art Spiegelman



Si Lewen's ghost is hanging in my studio—or, more accurately, I should say that one of Si Lewen's "Ghosts" hangs there. The artist painted about two hundred of these haunted and haunting figures in a series he began in 2008. He gave me my "Ghost" the first time we met, at his rest-home condo near Philadelphia back in the spring of 2013. Si was ninety-four years old then, a dynamo: a charming and elfin man, frail but bubbling with enthusiasm, wry humor, and unorthodox opinions. He spent his long days in the small second bedroom of his apartment—he had turned it into a fully functioning, miniature-size painter's atelier—working on his canvases, as he had most of his life.

I asked if he had any friends who lived at the facility, and he waved me off. "Nah! They're all too old for me—ghosts! Besides, I was always a loner." In his German-inflected English, he went on to say, "You know what keeps me going, Art? CURIOSITY! I want to find out what I'm going to paint tomorrow!"

I heard that line often in our subsequent phone conversations, though since early 2014, he has slowed down considerably. Instead of telling me that every

Art Spiegelman is the author of Maus. His essay "To Laugh That We May Not Weep" appeared in the January 2016 issue of Harper's Magazine. This essay is an excerpt from his introduction to Si Lewen's Parade: An Artist's Odyssey, which will be published in October by Abrams ComicArts.

This page: Self-portrait by Si Lewen, 1984 (detail)



morning, between sleeping and wakefulness, ideas for paintings would start clamoring for his attention, he has begun reporting that when he wakes up it takes him quite a while to figure out if he is still here or has already died. He is an atheist—the son of a highly regarded atheist Yiddish writer and a mother who was the direct descendant of a famous Hasidic wonder rabbi, the Seer of Lublin—but Si is the most God-fearing atheist I've ever met.

He had been aware of graphic novels and my work before we knew each other, and in 2011 he talked about the form at the Michener Museum in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, at an exhibition of drawings from *A Journey*, a story in pictures that he drew in the 1960s. He has continually tried to convince me to become a painter, since “comic books don't last, but a painting can be seen and appreciated forever, for centuries after it's painted!”

After we made contact, I began to appreciate the breadth and depth of Si's lifetime of work as well as to learn more about the fraught and full lifetime that shaped the work. He was born in Lublin, Poland, on November 8, 1918, just as World War I ended. The family moved to Berlin when he was almost two to escape Polish anti-Semitism, only to discover the German variant. Taunted by the German children, and his teacher, as “that Polish Jewboy,” Si retreated from contact with others, and, by the age of five—having been given some paints to occupy him while he was confined in a Swiss sanatorium when suspected of having tuberculosis—he declared himself a painter. Long and repeated visits to Berlin's art museums with his parents from toddlerhood on were his joy and the core of his education. Si told me that various paintings had spoken to him, but he wished they had been hung closer together “so they could talk to each other.” This observation planted a seed that would come to fruition years later in his mature work.





The young atheist resisted a traditional bar mitzvah, but made several dozen drawings to illustrate stories from the Bible instead. A few months later, he had his first exhibit in the small back room of a local bookshop, and began to sell his artwork. One oil painting of miserable workers trudging through the snow proved especially popular—it was “full of weltschmerz,” Si said—and he secretly made multiple copies, each of which he sold as the original. He felt his art career was off to a glorious start. It was dramatically interrupted in 1933.

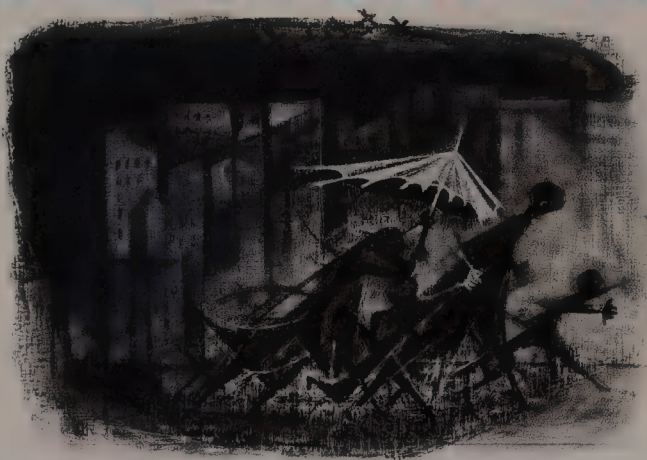
Very soon after Hitler became chancellor, fourteen-year-old Si presciently insisted on fleeing Germany. He and his older brother Isaac, a little over sixteen, left the family behind and took a train for Paris, staying briefly with friends of their parents (where shy Si lost his virginity to their hostess, by the way), and then traveled to a farm in the Loire Valley to learn skills that might help the two young refugees emigrate to Palestine.

By a miracle involving a wildly successful plan to raise private money for Admiral Byrd’s expedition to the South Pole through the selling of a commemorative stamp—organized by an uncle of Si’s in America who ran the numismatic franchise at Gimbels department store—a grateful Senator Harry F. Byrd, the admiral’s brother, arranged impossible-to-get visas for the entire family to immigrate to America in 1935.

One of the two traumatic events that permanently scarred the young artist brought Si’s first euphoric year in New York to an abrupt end on a summer afternoon in 1936. Sitting by the lake in Central Park after one of his many visits to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, he was beckoned over by a policeman in a rowboat who, on hearing his accented English, rowed him out to the center of the lake and bludgeoned him repeatedly with a blackjack—robbing him as he hurled anti-Semitic epithets. Aiming a gun at Si’s head, the policeman warned him not to tell a soul about what had happened or he’d come find him and kill

Opposite page: *Ghost*, c. 2013, from the collection of Art Spiegelman (top), and *Untitled*, 1999, with a collage inset from 1954 (bottom). This page: *Sunday Bridge*, 1952

SI LEWEN'S PARADE



an excerpt



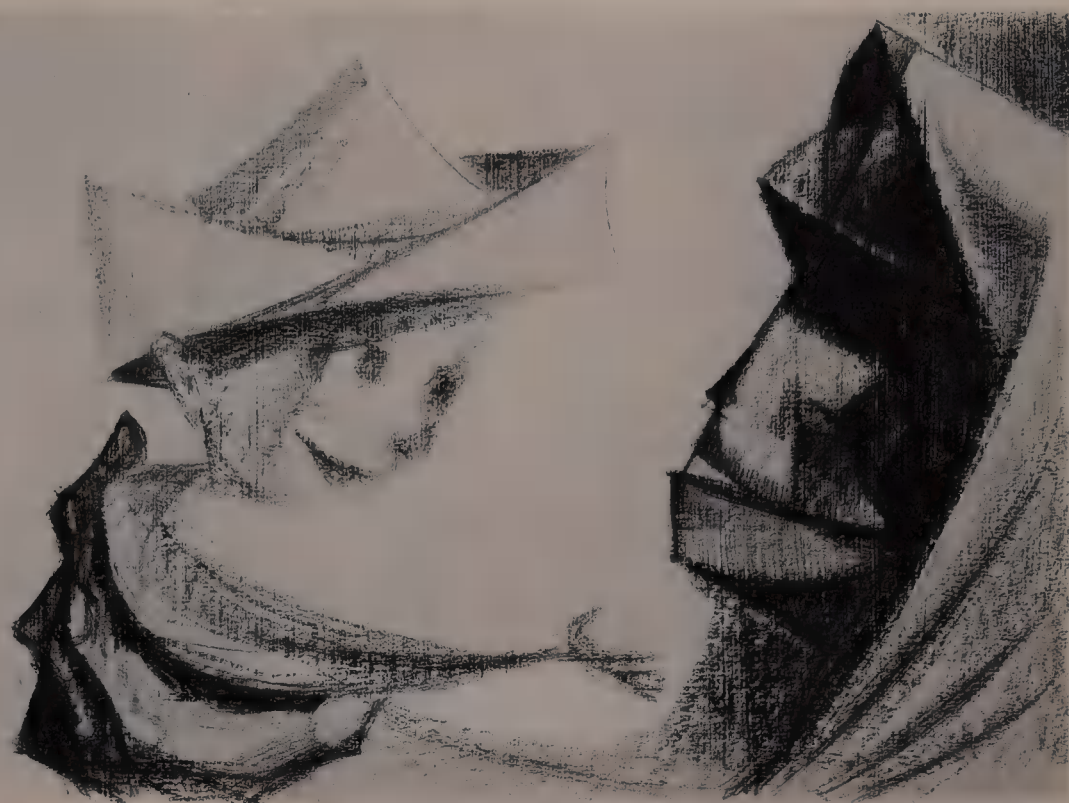
him. Bloodied, in pain, humiliated, and terrified, the refugee—an outsider even here in his “promised land”—made his way home. Deeply depressed, Si tried to poison himself a few weeks later—his first near-fatal suicide attempt—and was committed to a mental hospital in Westchester for observation. Only after meeting his future wife, Rennie, a year and a half later, did he begin to come to terms with the assault, which has haunted him all his life. He was unable to tell her, his closest confidante, about it until after more than forty years of marriage.

In 1942, Si married Rennie, shortly after enlisting in the army. Wanting revenge on the Germans, he temporarily overcame his pacifist inclinations and joined an elite intelligence unit of native German speakers, mostly young immigrant Jews like himself, who were trained at Fort Ritchie, Maryland, and used in translation, espionage, and psychological warfare. Si's primary duty was to broadcast from a sound truck at the battlefield to persuade German soldiers to surrender. Landing in Normandy nine days after D-Day, Si traveled along the front lines and into Germany, where he encountered his second lifelong trauma: witnessing the Buchenwald concentration camp shortly after it was

liberated. Surrounded by living skeletons and the smell of death, he wandered into the recently cooled crematorium. Having steeled himself through combat and with the help of schnapps, he broke down sobbing and—deeply shaken—fled. As he later wrote in



This page through page 55, top: a sequence from *The Parade*. This page, bottom: Panels 1326, 1101, 1102, 1103, 1104, and 1327 from the series *The Procession*, c. 1960–2014 (bottom)



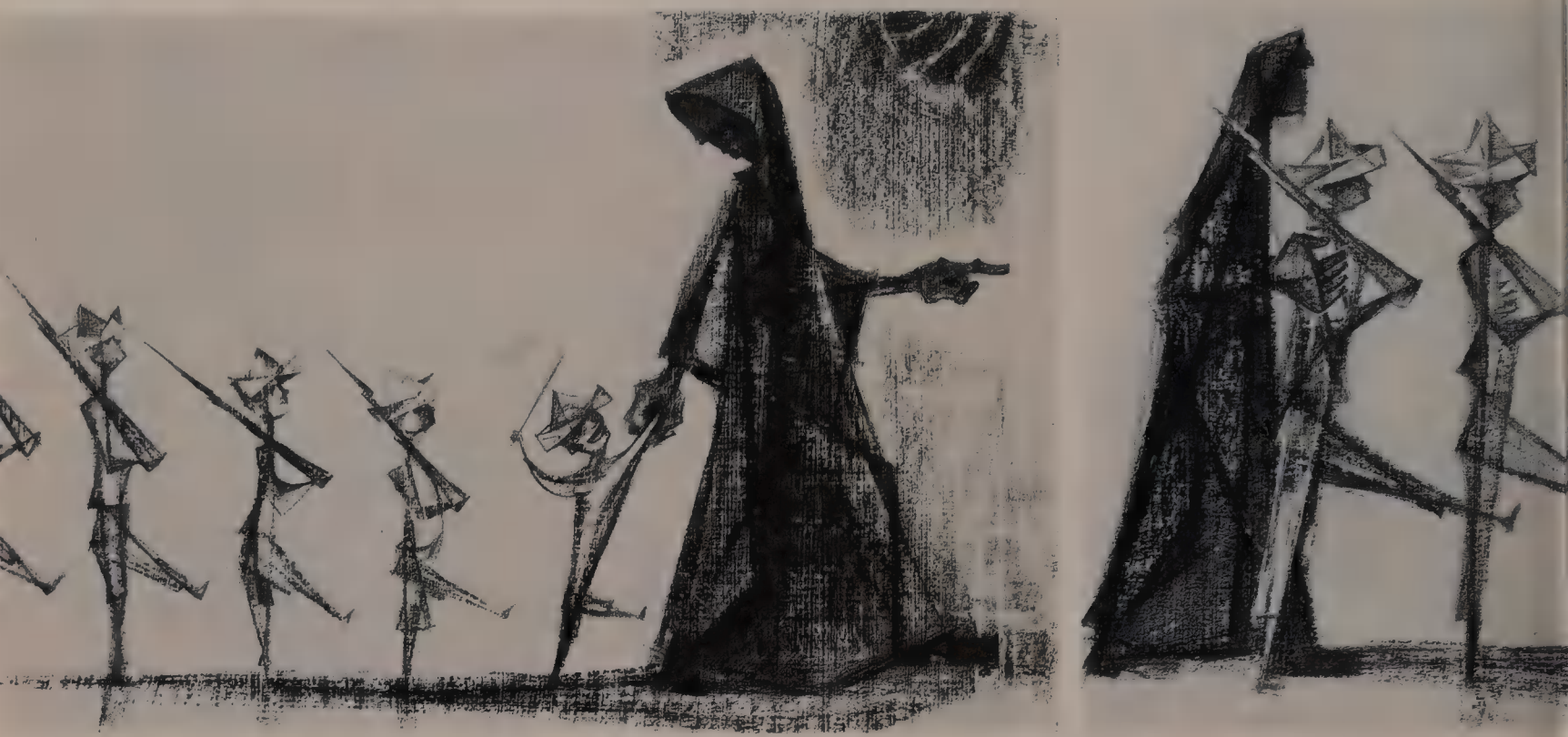
Self-Portrait, his unpublished memoir: "My insides were one wrenching mess. I knew that I was finished as a soldier, seeing the world for what, I thought, it was: a slaughterhouse, a bordello, and an insane asylum, run by butchers, pimps, and madmen.... A hospital ship brought me back to America, and half a year later I was discharged—'as good as new,' one of the doctors said. I was not so sure."

Back in America, Si was surprised to find that, when he picked up his paintbrushes again, his postwar works eschewed blacks and were suffused in dappled layers of color, forming a prismatic Cubism with an Expressionist edge. They gave him a way to put the dark past behind him and were greeted with commercial-gallery success. His work began to appear in museum exhibitions in the United States and Europe. The fourteen-year-old dropout now taught art at Cooper Union, and then at the New School as well. The birth of two children—Vivian, in 1947, and Nina, in 1949—made his future as sun-drenched as those paintings.

Still, by the turn of the decade, Si's unblinking memories and feelings of displacement began to reassert themselves. "My world of translucent color and light was turning into transparent lies," as the artist put it. By 1950, Si was pursuing an idea that had begun to gestate while he was still a soldier. Inspired by a lifelong love of movies—and in conscious resistance to the pure nonrepresentational abstraction that was coming to dominate contemporary art—he made *The Parade*.

The work begins with an excited crowd of flag-waving parents and children who gather to cheer a military procession of soldiers that turns into an abstract engine of war. Little boys playing with toy guns are beckoned from the arms of their mothers into the arms of a stylized Grim Reaper, who transforms the children into helmeted, goose-stepping cannon fodder—interchangeable cogs in a relentless war machine. A



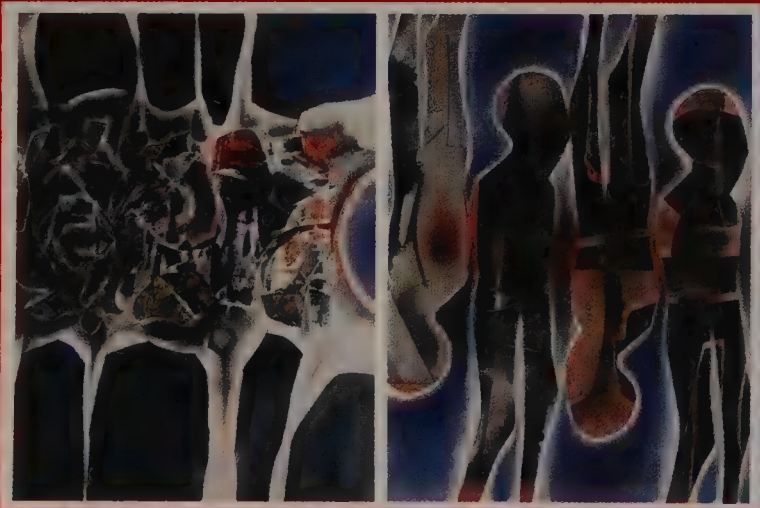


series of vignettes focuses on scenes of escalating havoc and suffering—the disasters of war—replete with bayoneted mothers and babies, terrorized families fleeing bombed-out cities, and devastated farms. The images accumulate into a panoramic harvest of blood and death. The parade turns into a hanging row of severed heads, a procession of the wounded and maimed, a march of ravaged survivors staggering under the weight of the coffins they carry.

A gray smoke-filled sky with a few birds finally gives way to a simple, somber image of exhaustion: the bodies of two soldiers each slouched over the other in a death embrace, pierced by each other's bayonet. A swirling and manic "victory" dance of the survivors immediately follows. In front of the ever-present flag-waving crowd, a small yapping hound—one of the many dogs of war running through *The Parade*—continues to bark as a mother protectively gathers a child with a flag to her bosom.

This is a powerfully moving free-jazz dirge of a book that depicts mankind's recurring war fever. It remains sadly urgent and relevant today.

In the fall of 1953, forty drawings from *The Parade* were shown at the Lotte Jacobi gallery in Midtown Manhattan, and described in the *Sunday New York Times* as having "a curiously impersonal yet intense feeling and are tremendously effective." Lotte Jacobi, best known as a portrait photographer, had arranged for a version of *The Parade* to be shown to her friend and frequent portrait subject Albert Einstein two years earlier. Einstein wrote Si a glowing letter, stating, "Nothing can equal the psychological effect of real art.... Our time needs you and your work!" Reviewers of the exhibit and the eventual book, published in 1957, compared the work with Goya's *Disasters of War*, the drawings of Käthe Kollwitz, and Picasso's *Guernica*. Si was al-

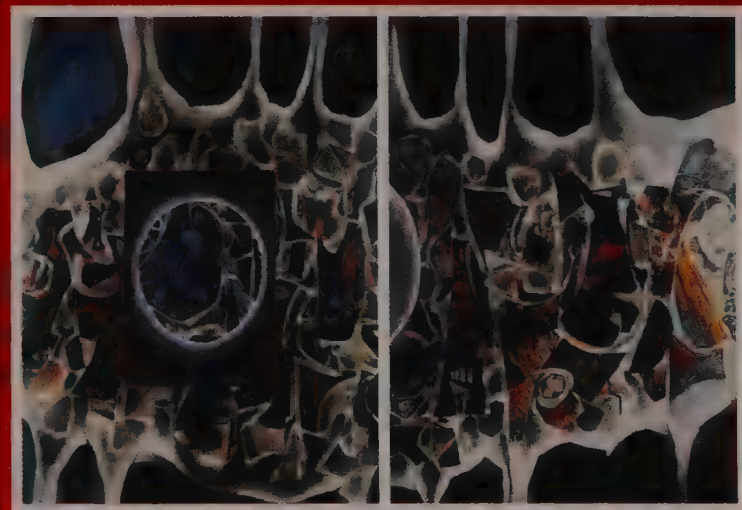


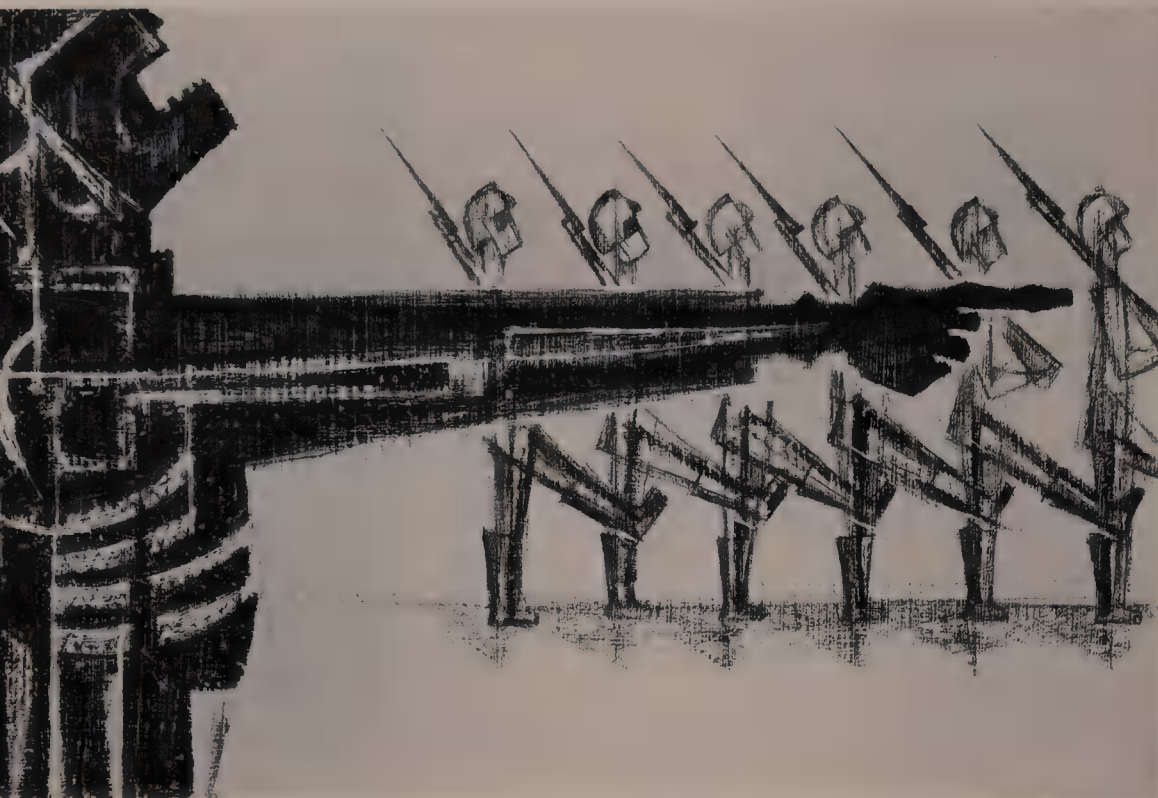


ways artistically ambitious and aimed to be part of this pantheon, but in a 1963 interview, when asked what his future plans were, he responded, "To put one foot in front of the other, as I've always done."

In the early 1960s, Si followed *The Parade* with another story in drawings, *A Journey*, a work more personal, albeit less universal, than his emotionally resonant *Parade*. Soon the two books of sequential drawings rather organically developed into painting sequences on canvas—often incorporating his developing approach to collage—in a project he called *The Procession*. Going well beyond diptychs and triptychs, Si began to produce a very long "multiptych"—extending imagery from one panel to the next, cinematically "intercutting" these panels with others in very different styles and moods. This was his childhood vision of putting museum paintings close together so they could "talk to each other." Although *The Parade* and *A Journey* are probably the most overtly narrative series Si ever made, these serial paintings unabashedly traffic in time as well as space. Putting one image, as well as one foot, in front of the other became his operating principle.

The long *Procession* of mostly figurative twenty- by forty-inch canvases, begun in about 1960, kept growing over the years until there were more than 1,800 panels. In 1963, *The Procession* was joined by another developing series, *Centipede*, thirty-six- by forty-eight-inch morphing images that Si intended as "one hundred feet of continuous, panel-by-panel progression.... A serpentine creature evolving into figures, into landscape, breaking up into floating rocks, suns, moons, and galaxies, joining again into perhaps a snake turning into a mountain range, and on and on." It quickly outgrew its original name and was rechristened *Millipede*—finally expanding to more than three thousand feet of panels.





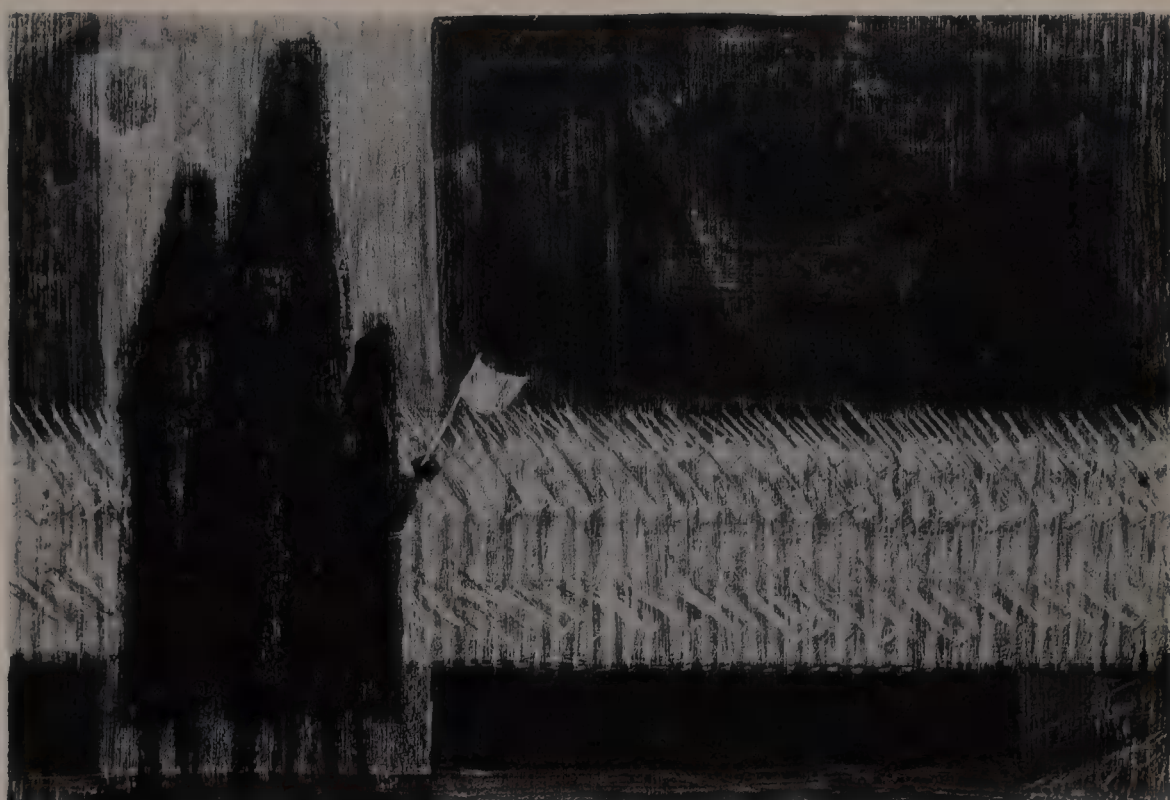
In 1967, Si began withdrawing his work from commercial galleries, and by 1985, after he officially proclaimed that “Art is not a Commodity! Art is Priceless!” his opportunities to be included in museum shows began to dwindle dramatically. But he still wanted his work to be seen, just not owned. He tried to set up a system somewhat like a public library that would “loan” paintings to anyone interested who signed an agreement not to sell them. He was surprised to find that other artists didn’t follow his example.

When art is priceless, it is also—as Si was quick to note—worthless. This pushed him not into retirement but into a torrent of productive activity that did not abate until 2014. Si plowed under earlier “worthless” works and redeployed them in his new ones with impunity—shuffling, rearranging, and adding to his mostly undated serial paintings.

Images of walking figures, mountain landscapes, soles of feet stacked up as if in concentration-camp barracks, feathered Indians, dancing figures, and celestial constellations kept coming up in the mix. No longer even vestigially tethered to any style, the paintings swung between looming tormented heads and bubbling, erotic panels of colorful biomorphic abstractions.

One short evocative series called *Eva*, made in 1994, consists of figure paintings of a naked woman, often doubled over in pain. With no indica-



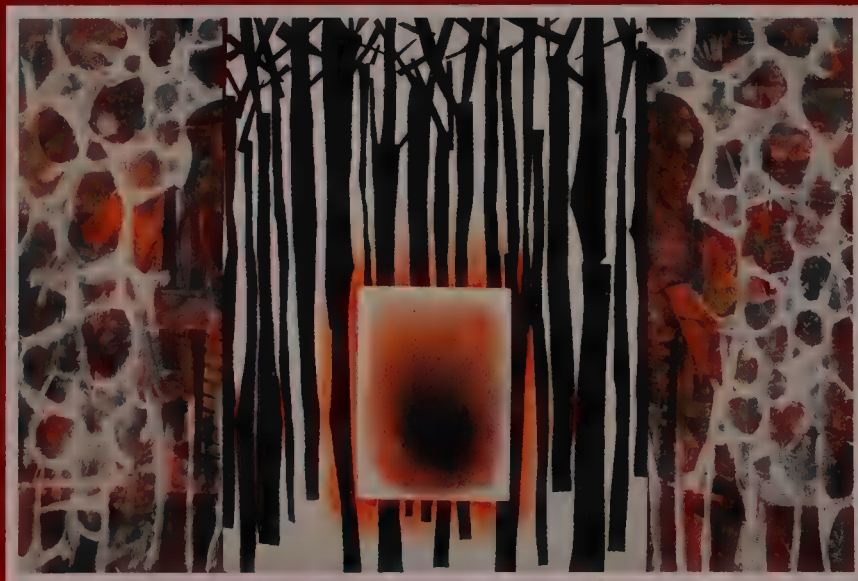


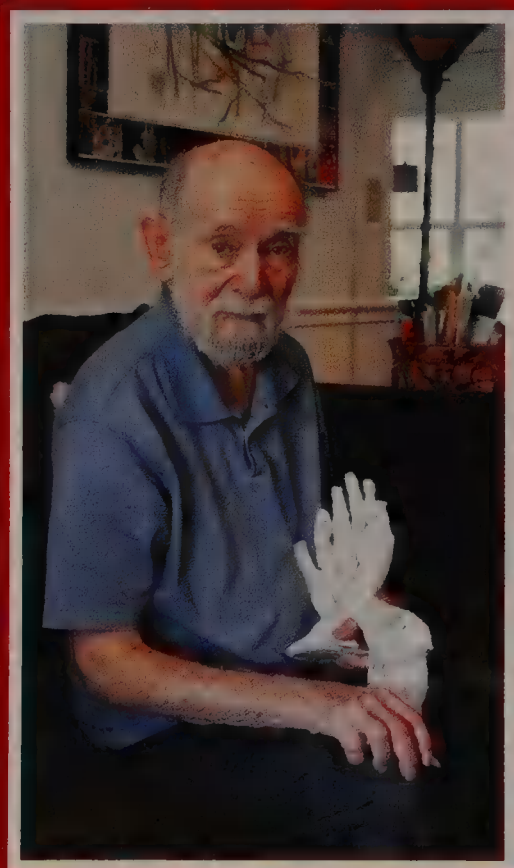
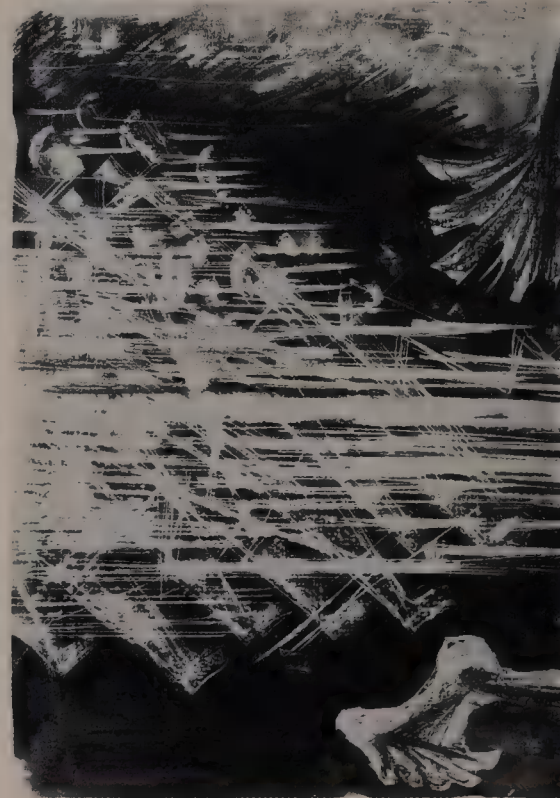
tion of which side is up in the forty-by-forty-inch paintings; an identifiable background, and no consecutive numbering, they evoke an adult creature floating in vitro.

Shortly before moving to the condo where he now lives, Si had abandoned an epic project of at least 330 pieces, *The (Unfinished) Odyssey of Si Lewen*, 1988—. It's an autobiographical work: an assemblage of family snapshots, occasional printouts from his unpublished memoir, postcards from his far-flung vacation travels, details from his seventy years of older paintings directly collaged or sometimes photocopied and extended into newly printed images, all on twenty-by-thirty-inch stretched canvases, like the dummy pages of an enormous book designed to be placed end to end across the sky. Some kind of graphic novel, I guess.

Though most of Si's series are far from traditional narratives, many hold a special interest for me as clues to one direction that comics might explore now that they've begun to be embraced by galleries and museums—not only as Pop Art or as exhibitions of original artifacts that were first intended for print publication but as allusive narrative works for intelligent adults looking at art made expressly for walls, willing to let a procession of canvases "unpack" their mysteries through repeated viewings. One can't immediately understand what the pictures are saying, but one understands that they are indeed "talking to each other."

In our regular phone conversations, Si began to complain about the pain in his right hand caused by rheumatoid arthritis. It had become excruciating to hold a brush, and nothing the





doctors did helped at all. He'd announced his "retirement" in occasional engravings, but it never lasted more than a few days, since painting was what kept him going.

At the beginning of 2014, I got a message from Si's daughter Nina. Si was in the hospital. He had tried to cut off his right hand with the buzz saw he used for making canvas stretchers and had been found unconscious and bleeding in his condo the next morning, having scrawled the word "Enough!" on his studio wall in large brushed letters. As he convalesced, the doctors said they ought to put him in a mental hospital. Except that he wasn't crazy, Si promised. "I'll never do that again. I didn't realize how hard bone is!"

As an extremely radical form of self-therapy, cutting through all the nerve endings in his wrist eventually stopped any sensation in his hand (including the rheumatoid arthritis) after his wounds healed. Back in his studio with a permanently useless right hand, Si tried to learn how to paint as a lefty, but he was unhappy with the occasionally interesting results. Although he did not have much history as a sculptor with either hand, Si thought he might get less frustrating results with his untrained left hand in a new medium. The "installation" I saw in his studio that spring made me gasp more than a dozen white sculpted hands of different sizes and different degrees of abstraction jutted up from the floor—sometimes the whole forearm, sometimes just fingertips. It looked like a zombie apocalypse! No—more accurately, it looked like the severed hands from *A Journey*, the book he had drawn about fifty years earlier!

Very recently, I told Si I intended to write about all this, and he asked if I was going to tell the truth about his hand or say—as he had to some people who inquired—that it had been an accident. "The truth," I said. He sighed and agreed. I tried to console him: "Hey! It worked for van Gogh—did wonders for his career!" Si laughed.



On February 12, 2015, Si's wife, Rennie, died. A few weeks later, I visited Si in the new quarters he had moved into. He called it his "cave." It was small and dark, but more specifically, he had painted directly on the walls as well as put up his paintings and tacked family photos everywhere. He had tried to continue painting by placing a plank on his narrow bed and kneeling in front of it, but couldn't keep that up for long. He needs a walker to get around, sleeps more now, and listens to the classical music he and Rennie used to share. Like some clockwork toy whose gears are gradually grinding to a halt, Si has begun to shift his curiosity toward the possibility of an afterlife.

I reminded him that he's an atheist, but Si has faith, if not in God, then certainly in the value of art (priceless) and in his own worth as an artist. Having made art the center of his world, Si Lowen has devoted himself to using art to express the core of his experiences, emotions, and convictions. Some of the styles and tropes he used are firmly fixed in what now looks like no-longer-modern Modernism, caught in the currents of Surrealism, Expressionism, Abstraction, and the other art storms he has lived through. Some of his work—the stylistic collisions and shifts, the juxtapositions forming series with temporal narrative beats—seems well ahead of its time. His horror at man's cruelty and stupidity, his moral lucidity, seem prescient and right on time. It doesn't take an Einstein to believe our time still needs him and his work.



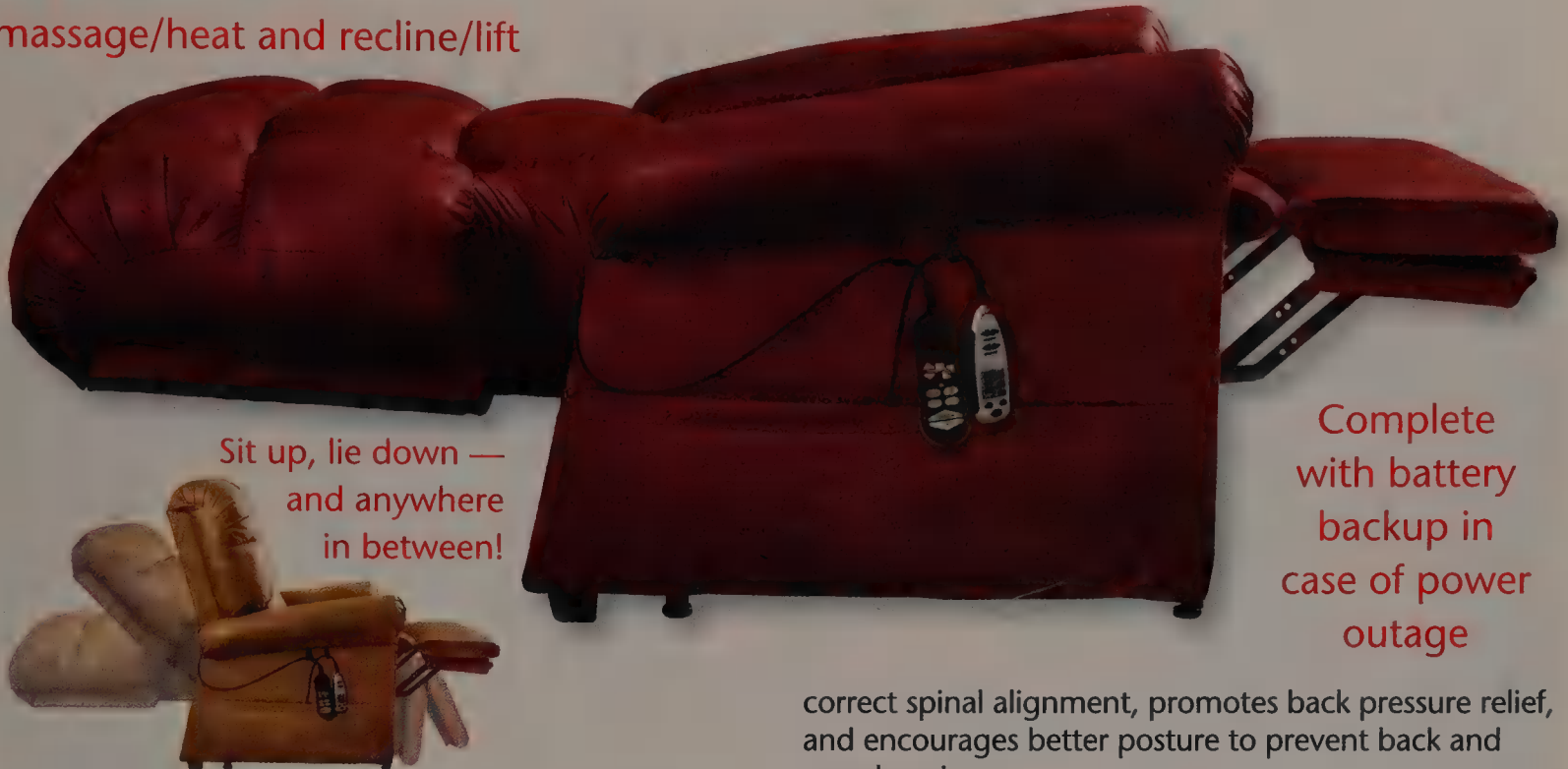
Drawing from *The Parade*, by Si Lowen (left), and drawing by Art Spiegelman (right)



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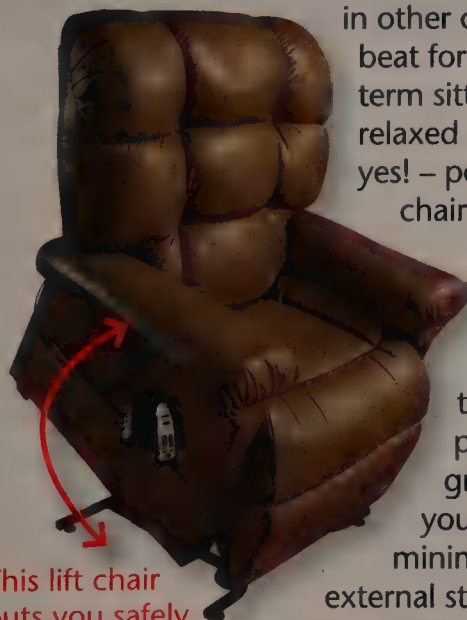
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ARROW HEADS

Living in archery
By Reeves Wiedeman



When an Olympic archer readies to shoot, she is staring down a distance of seventy meters—roughly three quarters of a football field—and aiming to hit a circle the size of a CD. An elite archer does not grip her bow tightly, fearing what anxious jitters might do; she attaches it to a string that wraps around her hand, extends her arm forward, and holds the bow in place with the skin

between her thumb and index finger. As she draws, more than forty pounds of resistance weighs on her fingers and back, and her bow stores so much energy that if she were to fire without an arrow the bow could break at both ends. The physical strain is never evident on her face, which remains in stern repose as she brings the string back to the same spot on her lips as the shot before and the shot before that. It presses against her mouth, pulling it into a frown, as if she were afflicted with a temporary bout of Bell's palsy.

She must hold steady—moving her release point by more than the width of a ballpoint pen would result in a miss. This is difficult enough on a good day, but arrows are not bullets. They dip under the weight of raindrops and veer in a gust of wind, which can force an archer to aim entirely off the target, a compensation process that has been referred to by the acronym S.W.A.G., which stands for Scientific Wild-Ass Guess. Once an archer is confident in her position, her chest and shoulders will stretch ever so slightly—a moment known as expan-

Reeves Wiedeman is a contributing editor of New York magazine.

Photographs from the second round of the U.S. Olympic trials for archery, April 17–21, 2016, in Chula Vista, California, by Benjamin Lowy

sion, which is attributed variously to breath, a muscular contraction, or a shift in blood pressure. At this point, her skeleton is aligned from her left hand, which holds the bow, to her opposite elbow, which is behind her ear. A tiny mechanical clicker on her bow will snap, letting her know that everything is in its proper place, and it's time to let go.

When an arrow is loosed, it does not fly straight; it wriggles like an eel. From bow to target, it will arc to a height of about ten feet, traveling at

none would recommend trying to shoot an apple off anyone's head, they are confident in their ability to do so without bloodshed at anything less than a hundred yards.

Or so it should go. "Something isn't right," Mel Nichols, an Olympic coach, said as he watched Khatuna Lorig, one of the best archers in the world, shoot earlier this year. She had just pulled the string to her lips, induced a frown, and then lowered her bow without firing. Lorig is a native of

this month in Rio de Janeiro. Archery is in the middle of an unprecedented boom: membership in USA Archery, the sport's national governing body, has quadrupled since 2011, and youth participation has quintupled. But more shooters means more competition, and because archery is a sport with almost no margin for error, both within an individual shot and over a career, Lorig was in danger of not making the Olympics if she couldn't get it together.



150 miles per hour, and arrive at its destination in one second. To anyone standing along its path, a passing arrow sounds like a viper hissing as it leaps forward to bite its prey. The archer stands and watches, a portrait of serenity hiding a tremor, while her string bounces back and forth like a snapped rubber band. Her bow, still attached to her hand, tips gently forward, as if genuflecting before what is almost certainly another well-struck bull's-eye. Olympic archers regularly split one another's arrows, and though

Georgia, a former Soviet republic, and a five-time Olympian with three countries, most recently the United States. She has long blond hair and an aquiline nose that stretches toward her target, and was wearing a skintight Nike T-shirt that was apparently not skintight enough: she had attached a safety pin to keep any loose fabric out of her string's path. Lorig took a deep breath, raised her bow again, and held steady for ten seconds.

Lorig was preparing to try out for the Olympics, which will take place

A full minute went by before Lorig finally loosed an arrow, which missed her target, wide right. "If you're confident, you step up there, you shoot, and you're done," Nichols said, shaking his head. "That's either panic or anxiety, or maybe it's a little bit of both." An elite archer told me that the tension between body and mind is so great that during a competition he once lost the feeling in his arms. All archers can do is try desperately to keep their thoughts from spinning entirely out of control.

The Easton Archery Center of Excellence, which is, by general consensus, the world's most excellent archery center, sits on eleven of the 155 acres that make up the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Chula Vista, California. To the west of the archery range is a BMX course, and to the east, beyond several beach-volleyball courts and a field for javelin, discus, and shot put, is the Lower Otay Reservoir, home to America's top rowers. To the south is Mexico. "You see border patrol a lot," Collin Klimitchek, one of the fifteen archers, including Lorig, who live and train at the O.T.C. year-round, told me when I visited in February. "There's been a couple of times when four-wheelers were flying all over the place looking for people." Should Donald Trump become president and his wall prove too expensive, one could imagine him asking America's best archers to put their skills to a more traditional purpose. "Then maybe we could get the government to fund us," Guy Krueger, one of the USA Archery coaches, joked.

The \$29 million archery complex, which opened last October, was built not with taxpayer dollars—the United States Olympic Committee is privately funded—but with the largesse of a foundation run by Jim Easton, the CEO of Jas D. Easton, the world's largest archery-equipment company. Plans for the range had been in the works since the mid-2000s, but America isn't in the business of backing losers, and U.S. archers weren't winning any medals. "If you don't medal, you don't exist," Krueger told me. The archers were left with a field on the southern edge of the O.T.C., even closer to the border, which they shared with the occasional rattlesnake.

The team's performance improved in 2012. The men won a silver at the London Olympics, and Lorig finished fourth—the best result for an American woman since 1988. More surprising, archery was the most watched sport on cable during the first week of the Games, topping even basketball. "The numbers for archery have been nothing less than huge," Alan Wurtzel, an NBC executive, said at the time, speculating that "maybe it's *The Hunger Games* phenomenon." The first movie in the series, which starred Jennifer Lawrence as an arrow-flinging revolu-

tionary, had opened earlier that year, as had *Brave*, in which a Disney princess wields a bow, and the first Avengers film, featuring Hawkeye, whose superpower is the ability to fire a bow with complete disregard for both proper archery form and the laws of physics. By comparison, archers praise Lawrence's technique, which she refined over ten hours of training with Lorig.

Now more than 20 million Americans pick up a bow every year, from hunters to yuppies on Groupon dates. An archery class I attended in Brooklyn was largely made up of young couples, plus a middle-aged woman who walked up to her target and snapped a photo of an arrow that had struck the bull's-eye.

ARCHERY WAS THE MOST WATCHED SPORT ON CABLE IN THE FIRST WEEK OF THE GAMES. "THE NUMBERS HAVE BEEN NOTHING LESS THAN HUGE"

"For my future ex-boyfriends," she said. Jay McAninch, the head of the Archery Trade Association, has seen cultural booms before—Rambo helped push the rise of bowhunting in the Eighties—but the industry hoped that this time would be different. In particular, McAninch wants to avoid the fate of fly-fishing, which saw an explosion in interest after *A River Runs Through It* until new fishermen realized that buying a rod and waders did not transform them into Brad Pitt. To help archery retailers cater to the expanding demographic, the A.T.A. recently published an article titled "What Motivates the Healthy, Happy, Hipster Hunter?"

Guns made bows largely obsolete for their intended purpose by the seventeenth century. (Historians note an exception: China, where archers were so highly skilled and well equipped that they continued to prove useful in battling nomads on the open steppe.) It turned out that many of the archers at the O.T.C. came from hunting back-grounds. Klimitchek, who grew up in rural Texas, said that were he better at it, he would prefer to shoot a rifle, and Sean McLaughlin, who moved to the O.T.C. with his twin brother, Daniel, said both of them "liked shotgun, but

figured this would be a little cheaper." (Archers get to reuse their ammo.) Observing a practice, I noticed that the attire among the group was red-state collegiate—a far cry from the bucket hats and long sleeves worn by archers from other countries—which meant sneakers, shorts, and bald-eagle belt buckles holding up American-flag quivers. (Backpack quivers are impractical for anyone but Errol Flynn.)

Zach Garrett, a twenty-one-year-old from Missouri who is one of America's top-ranking male archers, keeps his hair in a sidelong swoop, his lips in a boyish grin, and his Star Wars socks mismatched—Darth Vader on the left and a Stormtrooper on the right. "If I'm being honest, I got into archery after I saw the Lord of the Rings," he said. Like most of the resident archers, Garrett moved to the O.T.C. after the 2012 Olympics, and has rarely left since. Easton built a dormitory overlooking the range—athletes in other sports were stuck in older housing elsewhere on the campus—so that the archers would never be far from their bows. Six days a week, Garrett and the rest walk to the range around eight in the morning and spend most of the next eight hours shooting 300 arrows, which they keep track of on the type of clicker used by bouncers at popular nightclubs. "Whoa, Hawkeye!" a young boy in a football jersey yelled as he walked by on a tour of the O.T.C. None of the archers reacted. "I thought Legolas was badass," Garrett said, referring to Tolkien's elf, who once slid down a staircase loosing arrows into half a dozen orcs. "Now I just stand still and shoot things, so it's not really as badass."

Many of the resident athletes move to the Easton Center when they might otherwise be going off to college, which means that practice, during which the archers shoot side by side, has the air and humor of a locker room without the sweat or any serious injuries. When I asked LaNola Pritchard why she had a Band-Aid on her chin, she said that she had a "bow hickey"—which prompted Chris Webster, a former demolitions expert in the army who, at thirty-two, was the second-oldest O.T.C. resident after Lorig, to point out that his beard was going white at the precise spot where his string touched it.

On a balcony looming over the scene was Kisik Lee, the team's head coach, who was silently filming the practice on an iPad. Lee came to the United States in 2006, after winning eight gold medals as a coach for his native South Korea, the dominant power in world archery. Korea has won every women's team gold medal since 1988, and three of the past four men's golds. Lee's directive was to translate that success to American archery, but his tenure got off to a rocky start. When he first arrived at the

dardization was to recommend that all USA Archery coaches begin training students in a twelve-step shooting process that he had developed in consultation with a biomechanical engineer.

Such heavy-handed instructions were met with some initial resistance among the peewee archery set, but Lee's strict system was more familiar to Lorig, who was shooting by herself at the O.T.C., fifty feet away from the others, wearing a navy-blue bucket hat and headphones. ("If you were forty, and you

team also uses a computer program that develops mental strength, but without the shocks.) The importance of psychological fortitude was apparent when Lorig went to her first Olympics, in 1992, as part of the Soviet Unified Team (consisting of athletes from the defunct U.S.S.R.). She was eighteen, four months pregnant, and managed to win a team bronze medal.

But as the Soviet sports apparatus fell apart, Lorig was left on her own. She trained by candlelight in her mother-in-law's basement—"Georgians live together, like Italians," she said—while her newborn slept. She competed for Georgia in the 1996 Olympics, and decided that she didn't want to leave the United States. "I lived where everybody goes first," she said. "Brooklyn." She stopped shooting and worked odd jobs—at a toy store, in a gym—to support her family. "Everything was kind of hard, just struggling to every day survive," Lorig said, in her still-stilted English. "I only knew 'hi,' 'bye,' and f-word." She did not see her parents for two years.

Eventually, Lorig moved to New Jersey, where she found an archery range and began training again while continuing to work full-time. She represented Georgia once more, in the 2000 Olympics, but her life had begun to fall apart—"divorces, kids growing"—which made an archery career even harder. She watched the 2004 Games at home.

Two years later, after becoming a U.S. citizen, Lorig moved into the dorms at the O.T.C., leaving her son back with family in New Jersey. She qualified for the 2008 Games, at which her immigration story, and a fifth-place finish, earned her the honor of carrying the American flag during the closing ceremony. (Russian troops were occupying parts of Georgia at the time, so some viewed her selection as a political statement.) Lorig got the Olympic rings tattooed on her forearm, saying that she could think of nothing that defined her more. "She's been competing longer than we've all been alive," Sean McLaughlin said.

There is nothing physically preventing Lorig from continuing as a professional archer—her 2008 teammate, Butch Johnson, made his last of five Olympic teams at fifty-two—but younger competitors have been catching up to her. American men had already secured spots for a full team of




O.T.C., Lee began holding Bible-study sessions, and he sponsored the baptism of several athletes, saying that a strong sense of faith could help quiet an archer's mind and that he found it difficult to coach athletes who did not believe that a divine presence might have some influence on their arrows.

Lee was forced to stop proselytizing after a critical article appeared in the *New York Times* during the 2008 Olympics—it didn't help that God had not guided American arrows to any medals—but the archery community was even more rankled by Lee's efforts to institute a measure of rigid control, as is found in Korea. When Korean children learn archery, in elementary school, they spend up to six months perfecting their form in front of a mirror before picking up a bow. "If we tried to bring that system here, you would lose kids," Guy Krueger told me. Lee's attempt at a less tedious form of stan-

were training with people half your age all day, you'd get sick of it, too," Zach Garrett said.) When she first tried archery, in sixth grade at a state-sponsored archery school in her hometown of Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, Lorig was required to spend eight months drawing a bow in front of a mirror without loading an arrow. "You know how we got mentally strong?" Lorig said. "There was a small dark room, and we were strapped into a chair, and we had to watch this monitor with two lines and a square. The square was your heart rate." Lorig's coaches turned off the lights and started sporadically playing loud noises over a speaker. If Lorig jumped, and her heart rate spiked, she would get a shock on the wrists. Lorig said she got so good at the exercise that her coach had to turn up the voltage.

The point was to show archers that the key to success is as much mental as physical. (The American Olympic





three in the Rio Olympics, but the women were guaranteed just one spot, with a chance to qualify a team in June. After the first of three U.S. Olympic trials, held last September, Lorig was in fourth place. The top rank belonged to Mackenzie Brown, a twenty-one-year-old from Texas, who had seen Lorig as one of her role models while she was growing up. They were now sharing a two-room suite at the O.T.C. One afternoon, as I watched Zach Garrett shoot, I told him I was surprised that Lorig had continued to stay at the dorms. "See, that's the thing," he said, after setting his bow on the ground. "Some of these people who are really good, they don't have anywhere else to go." Lorig was off shooting by herself, with her headphones plugged in again, blocking out any distraction.

Watching an indoor-archery competition feels like sitting under a skylight during a rainstorm; the constant thwack of strings and the low thump of arrows hitting targets produces a steady beat. The National Indoor Championships, held at the Easton Center in February, was an especially cacophonous event, with a hundred contestants firing. They represented the archery world's constituent parts: There were college teams, retirees, and teenagers reading science textbooks between shots, which suggested that the watchful parents in the stands were primarily interested in how "national archery champion" would look on a college application. Many of the bows were taller than the people who shot them.

Lorig, Garrett, and several of the other O.T.C. residents stood together in the middle of the range. They were using the particular type of bow required by the Olympics, a recurve, so called because it bends back toward the target at each end. Recurves have been around for thousands of years—some scholars say that there's one in the *Odyssey*. Top-of-the-line modern recurves are made with the same synthetic foam that allows submarines to withstand extreme pressure, and come tricked out with sights, wind gauges, and bayonetlike stabilizers.

A recurve is simple, however, compared with a compound bow, which was invented in 1966 by Holless Wil-

bur Allen, a hunter in Missouri who sawed off the ends of a recurve and ran the string through a pulley system that gave his arrows more speed. The compound is now the most commonly used bow in America because it is the choice of hunters, like Paul Ryan, the Speaker of the House, who once posed for a *Time* magazine photo shoot in a suit and tie with a compound bow at full draw. (Ryan has taken up restructuring the excise tax on arrows as a pet cause.) Though compounds aren't permitted in the Olympics, any type of bow was allowed in the National Indoor Championships, so Lorig was shooting next to a man who looked as if he were trying to bag several deer.

Whatever the bow, all archers aim at a target with a bull's-eye, worth ten points, surrounded by concentric rings, each worth a decreasing number of points. In competition, archers shoot three arrows in a row, after which they score their own shots along with another archer, who provides a check on any cheating. When a mark is too close to call, a judge is summoned to examine it with a magnifying glass. Garrett recently won a match after a judge pulled out a pair of calipers and determined that his arrow had landed millimeters closer to the center than his opponent's.

Lorig won in her category by eight points, a landslide, but the victory was largely meaningless. The National Indoor Championships didn't count for her Olympic ranking—Mackenzie Brown had skipped the competition to attend a mental-training seminar—and netted her just \$2,000. Financially speaking, Olympic sports divide into three categories: those like basketball or soccer, for which the Games hardly matter; prestige events like gymnastics and track, in which a strong performance can mean six- or seven-figure endorsement deals; and everything else. "Everyone in our program I would consider a 'professional' archer, but no one's getting paid," Chris Webster, the former soldier, said over lunch in the O.T.C. cafeteria, where the archers were commiserating with a member of the women's rugby team about their crappy gear. Archery companies sometimes do pay archers if they win certain tournaments, but not much. Guy Krueger, who trained at the O.T.C. in the early 2000s, said, "I had an average of probably less than twenty

dollars in my bank account for probably two years.”

Every professional archer has a side hustle. A former O.T.C. resident made extra cash as a stunt double for an episode of *CSI: Miami*, in which someone was murdered by bow and arrow. One member of the silver-winning 2012 men’s Olympic team, Jacob Wukie, found work as a restaurant inspector, and another,

“When they go to competitions, they fly business class!” he said. Given that GE and Apple were unlikely to start sponsoring U.S. archery teams, Lee hoped for government support. Korean archers who win an Olympic gold medal are awarded a pension for life—Americans get \$25,000—while several European countries give archers do-nothing military jobs.

pseudo-celebrity would give novice archers something to aspire to, in the same way that young basketball players can dream of a shoe deal with Nike. But it was unclear exactly how well he was doing. Some archers suggested that his income had inched into the six figures, but a friend of Ellison’s told me his guaranteed sponsorship money was less than half that.



Jake Kaminski, runs an archery company with his wife near their home in Gainesville, Florida, where he was training for Rio. Lorig once spent six months driving a cab in Los Angeles. After coaching Jennifer Lawrence, she had been able to recruit a stable of students, but that hardly paid enough to live on. “If not for archery, I would probably be married and milking the cows in Georgia,” she said with a shrug. After a failed attempt to secure an endorsement deal with Celestial Seasonings, which sells a Tension Tamer among its varieties of herbal tea, Lorig finally landed her first campaign with a non-archery brand in April: Bridgestone put her in a commercial to show how far its tires could go after she pierced one with an arrow.

The world’s only true archery salaries are in Korea, where Coach Lee estimated that two hundred or so archers receive upwards of \$50,000 to compete for professional teams sponsored by companies like Hyundai and Samsung.

“Brady’s the only one doing it for a living,” Chris Webster said. “You know, the twenty-foot guy on the wall?” He meant Brady Ellison, who led the American men’s team in 2012 and has his face emblazoned on a mural in the Easton Center’s lobby. Ellison’s forearm is covered in tattoos marking his Olympic appearances in Beijing and London, and he plans to wrap another around his elbow for Rio. Beyond his archery talent, Ellison has both the rugged image that appeals to companies catering to survivalists—he killed a bear with a bow when he was eleven—and a television-friendly personality: after winning a competition, he headed for a young woman waiting on the sidelines (now his ex-wife), grabbed her by the waist, and kissed her, bow still in hand. “I think the crowd should be pumped up and cheering,” he told me. “You win a big tournament, don’t act like your grandma just died.” The hope was that Ellison’s

Other archery careers never got off the ground. One day at the O.T.C., Lorig was visited by her son, Levan, with whom she had been pregnant at the 1992 Games. Lorig coached Levan for years, hoping that they might become the first mother–son duo to qualify for a single Olympics in any sport, but Levan broke her heart two years ago, when he sold his bow to buy a car. He now had a girlfriend, and hadn’t shot in months. When a friend tried to explain to Lorig that, for an American child, your twenties are a period of exploration rather than commitment, Lorig couldn’t quite understand. “He dreams about the Olympics,” Lorig said. “But it takes a lot more than just talk and shooting arrows once in five months. I don’t take off. I live here. I live in archery.”

To observe the archery boom’s grassroots, I went to Balboa Park, in the center of San Diego, and met several members of the

San Diego Archers. The club's main range is in a canyon squeezed between the zoo, a freeway, and the San Diego Museum of Man, and bisected by a bridge. "One evening a couple years ago, I was shooting at a target under the bridge," Patty Koutz, the group's secretary, told me. "And I hear someone yell, 'Hey! I just saw this movie that had archery in it, and I decided I wanted to

got elk, skunk, goats, bobcat, bear," she said. For a recent competition, they had attached a pig to a zip line. Koutz had taken a class to learn how to build her own wooden longbow, and said that she gets most of her enjoyment out of shooting with gear she made. Plus, she explained, "A lot of people are realizing this is a sport where you don't have to be especially physically fit."

her hands. "This is what happens when you shoot a bow," Lorig said, showing me the three fingers on her right hand that she uses to draw her string. They were covered in as many calluses as a lead guitarist's and noticeably fatter than the fingers on her left.

The range of body types that fills archery's elite ranks was enough to get a guy dreaming about his own



try it, and then I come walking across the bridge and here you are.'"

The man had seen the first *Hunger Games* film. Since then, the group's membership has tripled, but Koutz said the series was just one reason for the expansion. The club now has a number of soldiers—archery is sometimes used as a treatment for PTSD—and others who got into the sport for its meditative value. (*Zen in the Art of Archery*, the 1953 book by Eugen Herrigel, a German philosophy professor, is a foundational text in the mindfulness movement.) Koutz is a fiftysomething molecular biologist. When we met, she wore earrings in the shape of the earth, and she said that when she joined, in 2008, she had been one of many people taking to the sport as a way to bond with nature. She showed me around the range, which was set up like a golf course amid a forest of palm trees and cacti. Once a month, the club arranges a series of foam targets in animal shapes. "We've

That was something I had noticed in Chula Vista, where the archers were taut in the forearms and back but did not fill out their T-shirts. Olympic archers walk four or five miles a day to retrieve their practice arrows, but weight lifting isn't required. (Some is recommended for general fitness, and to prevent lopsidedness: archers report that the muscles on their right sides are much larger than those on their left.) The World Anti-Doping Agency administers drug tests to archers, but most at the O.T.C. couldn't imagine anything having much effect on them. "Weed, maybe, to help you relax?" Webster suggested. One archer had heard of parents feeding their children ginseng root to increase focus, which you can read more about in "Effect of Ginseng Preparation for Improvement of Cerebral Blood Flow in Professional Archers." The only real way to tell an archer from a member of the general population is to get a good look at

prospects. Jennifer Lawrence had gotten good in just ten hours with Lorig, and the actress Geena Davis nearly qualified for the 2000 Olympics after two years of practice. If I devoted myself to archery for the next four years, I began to wonder, was a trip to Tokyo in 2020 a possibility?

For answers, I called Hoyt Legal, in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, and asked for Thomas Stanwood, a lawyer at the firm. Stanwood had shot compound bows as a child, but then gave up the sport until 2009, when he went to law school and needed a diversion. He picked up a recurve for the first time at thirty-two, and a month later finished fifth at the 2010 Indoor Nationals. Two years after that, he nearly qualified for the Olympics. "It's not that difficult to get pretty good at archery," Stanwood said. He had an understanding boss, an even more understanding wife, and, as of a year ago, a back yard large enough to fit a seventy-meter range. After dropping

archery for two years to focus on his legal career, he was now shooting two hours a day after work, which was far less than the archers in Chula Vista, but enough to put him in sixth place after the second stage of the U.S. Olympic trials in April.

As for my Tokyo hopes, Stanwood said that, in a matter of months, most anyone could become a very, very good archer. Becoming an Olympian was a more difficult task, and more difficult to explain. Stanwood, for starters, seems to be something of a savant when it comes to noncardiovascular competition: he is a scratch golfer and a pool shark, and played competitive video games before that became a more lucrative career than professional archery. "The thing that's gonna take you to my level is some *thing* that can't necessarily be taught," he said, comparing firing a bow to an internal symphony whose movements only work as a whole. "How do you teach that?" he said. "People have to learn that for themselves."

"You're sick," Ed Lucero, who helps run the Easton Center, told me when I returned for the second night of the National Indoor Championships. Lucero is something of a Don King figure for San Diego archery, tasked with promoting the sport—he signs his last name "Loose-Arrow"—but even he seemed to recognize its limitations. "If you have no vested interest, this is terrible to watch," he said. "Even parents will tell you that after fifty arrows, they're falling asleep." A scan of the bleachers confirmed as much, as did one parent's reaction when an award was given to her child: "Thank God. Now we can leave." The most exciting moment during the entire three-day event came when everyone was startled by a loud pop: a man had fired without loading an arrow, and his bow snapped.

There was general agreement that more explosions would be good for the sport. "It would be cool if, when somebody shot a thirty"—three straight bull's-eyes—"they had fireworks coming out of the target," Collin Klimitchek suggested. Archery as a spectator sport has been in decline more or less since the eighteenth century; croquet was often deemed more interesting to watch. Archery was included in several early Olympics, but disappeared from

1924 to 1972 because the world's archers couldn't agree on a set of rules. Twenty years later, the Olympics introduced a head-to-head format; individual matches were divided into games, like in tennis, to make the competitions more exciting. But this can still be a tough sell to audiences, since even archers need binocular scopes to tell exactly where their arrows land—Swarovski scopes are the bling of the archery world—and on television, it's impossible to track an arrow's path. Lucero thought that perhaps NBC could adopt something like the glowing puck that was briefly used to track movement during televised hockey games, an idea that is largely considered one of the great follies in modern sports television. (Wurtzel, the same NBC executive who shouted the sport's praise in 2012, put the excitement in perspective by noting that "archery is the new curling.") The qualification round, which consists of each archer shooting seventy-two arrows, is a soporific process, and the organizers in London scheduled the event for the morning before the opening ceremony. Archers find themselves with a lot of downtime, and during the National Indoor Championships, Lorig checked Facebook on her phone, played with a dog that a friend had brought, and finished an entire sleeve of Ritz Crackers. Garrett's girlfriend brought him leftovers from the Cheesecake Factory.

As with most eccentrics, American archers tend to be comfortable with their position on the fringe. They view most mainstream encroachment with skepticism, and admit that an activity often used to relax the mind is not likely to become a fixture of sports broadcasting. Archery is meant to be a pursuit, not a performance, and even the most impressive shots make for quiet entertainment. All the action happens inside an archer's head, and until ESPN hooks up archers to a brain scanner, there won't be much for spectators to see.

That didn't stop one fan from trying to get a better view by flying his drone over the range at the final U.S. Olympic trials, held on Memorial Day in central Florida. (Officials forced him to land it.) The field had been narrowed to eight archers of either gender. Mackenzie Brown led the women's

pack, while Lorig had dropped to fifth place, two spots out of Olympic contention. It was ninety degrees, and all of the archers wore T-shirts and shorts; to keep the rising sun out of their eyes, many had attached small pieces of paper to their baseball caps. On the men's side, Zach Garrett, Brady Ellison, and Jake Kaminski nabbed the three spots to compete in Rio as a team and as individuals. Lined up among the women, Lorig was using a new bow painted like an American flag, and after several months of disappointing performances, her decades of Olympic experience finally came through. She took first place in a series of elimination matches, beating Brown along the way; by the end, she'd leaped into third, behind Brown and Hye Youn Park, a Korean archer who received her American citizenship just last year.

The three advanced to a tournament in Turkey in mid-June—their last chance to qualify as a team in Rio. During the quarterfinals, against Ukraine, Lorig was the final American female archer, and she needed a bull's-eye to stave off elimination. She stepped up to shoot, pulled the string against her lips, but then she hesitated, and lowered her bow. When she finally fired, her arrow sailed wide. Mackenzie Brown would be the only American woman going to the Games. Lorig's effort to reach another milestone had also been thwarted: a few weeks earlier, two pistol shooters from her native Georgia qualified as the first mother-son pair to compete in a single Olympics.

Before the trials, each of the archers had already begun to face their uncertain futures. Klimitchek planned to enlist in the military; the McLaughlin twins wanted to go to school. Zach Garrett had started a stabilizer company with an archer who had a degree in aerospace engineering. All felt sure that they wanted to move as far away as they could from life inside the dorms at the O.T.C. Lorig remained an exception. "You look at Khatuna, and longevity's not really limited to what your body can do," Garrett said. "It's limited to how willing you are to put off the rest of your life." Lorig told me that she plans to be back for 2020, and beyond. "Of course I'm not quitting," she said. "I have a goal, and I'm very stubborn." ■

1 9 2 8

THE GAMES

By John Roberts Tunis

For several hundred years, no matter who was fighting or what kind of warfare was being waged, a truce was always proclaimed throughout the land at the time of the Olympic Games in order to allow spectators and athletes to make the journey in safety. A winner was escorted home in triumph in a chariot and taken into his native city through a breach in the walls made to signify that a town capable of producing such a man needed no protection. Poets like Pindar and Simonides composed hymns of praise in his honor; for a long time the Olympic victor was regarded as the expression of Grecian culture at its highest. But as the Games grew in importance and prestige their spirit and that of the victors changed immeasurably.

Very soon it was found that the earlier winners, men who devoted little or no time to preparing for the Games, were being beaten by men who took months to train seriously for the different events. Towns and cities discovered how beneficial it was to produce the winner at Olympia: grants of money and assistance were given their athletes, and before long the simple wreath of olives was by no means the only prize the victor at Olympia received. Indeed, so open and so apparent were the commercial recompenses dispensed, so far did the games begin to drift from the Olympic ideal of old, that men like Plato and Socrates denounced them in public, doubtless receiving the same sort of derision as those who venture to question our sporting panorama of the twentieth century. Then, as now, a class came into existence which openly devoted its time to the serious business of ath-

letics. Its vocation, as well as its avocation, was the Olympic Games.

Before long whole towns began to compete for the services of athletes in much the same manner as our professional baseball players are bought and sold in the open market today. Thus



we are told how Astylus of Crotona declared himself to be a citizen of Syracuse, and how Sotades of Crete became a citizen of Ephesus, both men receiving large sums of money in the transaction. Furthermore, not only were the amounts bestowed upon the winners by grateful townsfolk enormous, but not infrequently the victors were given the right of "Sitiesis," or free subsistence for life, in other words a kind of athletic pension. So open was the venality of the ancient Olympics that the religious atmosphere in which they originated was lost sight of, and when athletes became out-and-out professionals, abandoning all other occupations, interest in the contests began to abate. These Games, conceived

in a spirit of religious purity, became the victim of corrupt professionalism and finally came to an end in 394 A.D.

Study closely the history of the modern Olympics, and you will have difficulty in discovering many which did not leave a series of unfortunate incidents in their train. The aftermath of the Games of 1908 in London was a series of booklets and pamphlets attributed to Mr. Gustavus Kirby on our side, and on the British side to Mr. Theodore Cook, each man pointing out the inaccuracies of the other in no uncertain manner. In fact, it was Mr. Cook who set us down properly by remarking that "the 1908 Olympic Team from America will go down in history as the team on whose behalf more complaints were made than any other."

It may have been true that our 1908 team did win the International Olympic Complaint Record; but was it not actually the British that year who protested over the decision in the 400-meter run? In the final heat of this event there were four Americans running against a single Englishman, Lieutenant Halswelle. As they came into the turn the Englishman found himself unable to get past his three opponents. The claim was made that he had been boxed, that is, deliberately pocketed so that he could not get by his competitors. This all the Americans energetically denied, stating that it was every man for himself, and that if Halswelle had been pocketed it was his own fault. British judges sustained the British protest, however; the race was ordered rerun. The American captain refused to permit his men to compete again, and Halswelle ran the race alone as the winner. ■

From "The Olympic Games," which appeared in the August 1928 issue of Harper's Magazine. The complete essay—along with the magazine's entire 166-year archive—is available online at harpers.org/fromthearchive.



ABANDON ALL HOPE

Hieronymus Bosch comes home

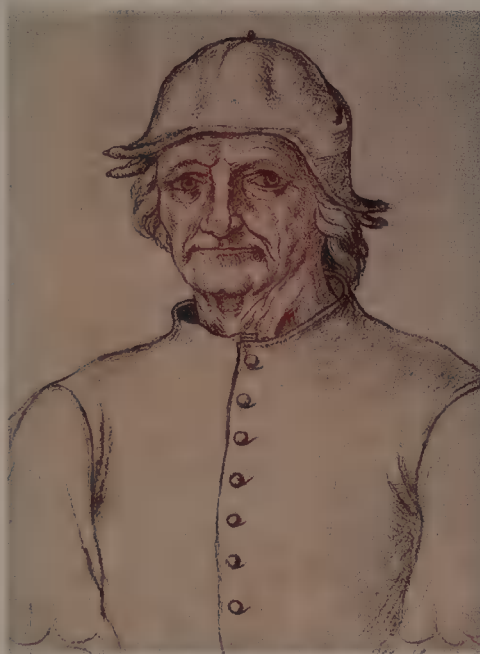
By Nat Segnit

A naked man grabs me by the lapels and bares his teeth in frustration. I say naked, when I mean clad in a skintight nude suit that delineates his six-pack and decorously abstracts his genitals in the manner of a kids' action figure. I have been assaulted by the personification of Anger. I'm probably being paranoid, but the unshakable sense of foreboding this gives me derives, as far as I can tell, from the suspicion that his little coup de théâtre is so effective because the guy playing Anger has actually taken against me, can discern in me something weak or sinful that he could exploit as grist for his performance. Earlier, a jester wearing a boat around his midriff had sniggered at the way I was holding my press folder. Maybe I'm not being paranoid, and the bad feeling I've had since I walked onstage at the Theater aan de Parade—which will increase over the course of my stay—is only an appropriate response.

Hieronymus B., Nanine Linning's immersive "dance triptych," is one of more than ninety "fascinating cultural experiences" to be staged in and around the small Dutch city of 's Hertogenbosch to mark 500 years since the death of its most famous son. No one knows exactly when Jeroen van Aken was born, but the date of his funeral mass at St. John's Cathedral—August 9, 1516—is recorded in the archives of the Brotherhood of Our Lady, the then-Catholic confrater-

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nity that counted him among its members and in its ecumenical incarnation survives to this day. ("Hieronymus," incidentally, is a Latinization of "Jeroen," or "Jerome," Bosch's patron saint and



later a favorite subject; in adopting the name of his hometown, Bosch was swapping one toponym for another—Aachen, in Germany, being the birthplace of his ancestors.) From a contract dated to 1475, which mentions Bosch working with his father on a carved altar for the brotherhood, it's assumed he was born around 1450.

's Hertogenbosch lies roughly fifty miles from Amsterdam, in the southerly province of North Brabant. It's a quiet, attractive, prosperous-seeming place, with a well-preserved medieval center inside the remains of its

fourteenth-century ramparts. On the train from Schiphol Airport the announcer placed heavy emphasis on the first syllables, 'S-HER-to-gen-bosch, as if to gee himself up for the syllables to come. The locals give themselves a break and call it Den Bosch. The focus of the celebrations is *Visions of Genius*, an exhibition of Bosch's work at the Noordbrabants Museum (which ended on May 8); Charles de Mooij, the director, has secured seventeen of the surviving twenty-four paintings attributed (with varying degrees of certainty) to Bosch, and nineteen of the surviving twenty works on paper. Never before—conceivably not even in his lifetime—have so many of Bosch's works been assembled in one place, all the more impressive an achievement given that the Noordbrabants is a small, provincial museum, numbering precisely zero Bosches in its permanent collection.

The quid for the Noordbrabants's quo, in the case of the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice and other world-class institutions loaning work to the exhibition, comes in two forms: restoration and knowledge. With backing from the government, corporate partners, and the Getty Foundation, the Bosch Research and Conservation Project has restored nine of the loans and undertaken detailed reflectographic analysis, resulting, among other things, in the attribution to Bosch of two pieces hitherto considered to be workshop: a drawing, *Infernal Landscape*, and a panel fragment, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, the latter stored for the past



decade in the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City, Missouri.

There's a deal of national and civic pride at stake here. The official slogan of Jheronimus Bosch 500, printed on banners fluttering from the city's lampposts and on the blue track tops sported by its crack detail of official guides, is *WELKOM THUIS, JHERONIMUS!*—"Welcome home, Hieronymus!" (If it grates that Bosch's most famous painting, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, is staying put in the Prado, none of the infallibly charming and diplomatic representatives of JB500 will admit it. The Spanish are oddly proprietary about the painter they refer to as *El Bosco*, perhaps because gruesome depictions of Hell remained popular in ultra-Catholic Spain long after they had lost their appeal in Northern Europe. When I ask Lian Duif, JB500's director, if a loan of *The Garden* was ever in the cards, she is categorical. "We didn't even ask for it," she says. "It's the same as our *Night Watch*—it will never travel." The objection that Rembrandt was Dutch,

and Bosch not Spanish, seems abruptly inappropriate, and I take a big bite of my complementary apple pancake to cover the silence.) The program of ancillary events—the "Bosch Experience"—seems designed to reassert a link weakened by half a millennium of acquisition and dispersal, and to carry on reasserting it long after the Noordbrabants show completes its short run. (Until September 11, the paintings will be reunited with *Earthly Delights* at the Prado, in a show that the Spanish, true to form, are calling "the most complete and one of the highest quality organized to date." *Bienvenido a casa, Jerónimo.*)

Aside from *Hieronymus B.*, visitors to Den Bosch in 2016 are promised a Heaven and Hell cruise, by open boat along the canalized River Binnendieze, which runs through and sometimes underneath the city center and will in certain subterranean stretches be enhanced with 3-D projections of hellfire, screeching bats, and winged demons; A Wondrous Climb, a walk up a clanging gantry staircase to the roof of St. John's

Cathedral, for a look at both the grotesques on the flying buttresses and, beyond the city limits, a sodden polder called the Bossche Broek, supposedly much as it was in Bosch's time; and *Bosch by Night*, the obligatory son et lumière, in which animated figures from Bosch's paintings will be projected against the façades of four buildings on Markt, the town's main square.



Many of the events depend, like *Hieronymus B.*, on the animation of Bosch's imagery. (Albinus in Nabokov's *Invitation of a Beulah* has pretty much the

same idea, to have “some well-known picture, preferably of the Dutch School ... brought to life.” But then, “his life ended in disaster.”) The implication, I guess, being that art is more accessible when it moves, and the still stuff is for a specialized audience prepared to fork out twenty-two euros to get past the security guards at the Noordbrabants. In any case, for the rest of the year the city will assume the status of an upmarket theme park based on the bold proposition that insistent and graphic reminders of the eternity of torment awaiting all but a few of us might represent a fun day out for all the family. The calculation seems to be that Bosch’s appeal has long extended beyond his natural constituency of museumgoers. I don’t know much about art, but I know I like men farting out blackbirds while being eaten alive by blue bird-headed monsters, shod in pewter jugs.

You can almost hear Ton Rombouts rubbing his hands. Rombouts, the mayor of Den Bosch, is smooth in a vaguely Blairite fashion, well-preserved for sixty-five, with the mobile middle of the practiced politician, accustomed to multilateral glad-handing. In his welcome to the press he trots with exemplary freshness through a speech he must have given a thousand times. The difficulty of pronouncing ’s Hertogenbosch. Its “Burgundic atmosphere.” (For a period in the fifteenth century, the Duchy of Brabant was ruled by the dukes of Burgundy, the legacy of which is, supposedly, the easygoing, café-cultural, work-to-live *joie de vivre* that marks the locals out from the sullen Calvinists north of the Maas.) The intolerability of leaving town without trying the local speciality, the *Bossche bol*, which, by all appearances, is nothing other than a massive profiterole.

The difference this year, of course, is Hieronymus, whose benefit to the city of his birth, Rombouts explains in his mostly fluent English, can be expressed not only in tourist “spendings,” welcome as they may be, but in terms of the lessons Bosch can teach us in this “time of fear,” when the seven deadly sins “are still worrisome topical.” By depicting them so vividly, Bosch can help us not capitulate to “hate and greed and fury.” If Rombouts has an overriding ambition for the Bosch 500 program, it’s that it will bring “hope, again, to our society.”

It’s a notion I’ll hear promoted several times over my two visits: Bosch as the painter of hope.

In the absence of *Earthly Delights*, the star attraction at Visions of Genius is *The Haywain*. When I visit after the show has opened to the public, there are almost as many people crowded in front of the triptych as there are depicted in its famously populous central panel, which is kind of apt given what the painting has to say: we’re going to Hell. All of us. In hard-edged, high-keyed pinks and blues and yellows, all manner of humanity escort a wagon piled high with hay as it trundles, unbeknownst to them, toward damnation. As the art historian Walter S. Gibson notes, hay would have been familiar to early-sixteenth-century audiences as a metaphor both for the worthlessness of material goods and for deceit: “To ‘drive

back, their conspicuous dignity ironized by their direction of travel. They’re all headed the same way. Above, ignored by everyone save an angel kneeling in prayer, a small and rather ineffectual Christ emerges from a pink-and-gold cloud, holding up his arms as if to say, “Uh, hello? Remember me?” The procession to Hell matches the drift of our interest: it’s no surprise to find the crowd that much thicker in front of the right panel. (In the left panel, the Expulsion from Eden, the Fall of Man, the Creation, and the Fall of the—horrible, insectoid—Rebel Angels are presented in vertical succession. Read against the left-to-right orientation of the central and right panels, the gist here seems to be that the Creation and Fall were as good as coeval, i.e., that Paradise was gone in the blink of an eye.)

You get the sense, talking to some Bosch aficionados, that liking him for his



the haywain’ with someone,” he explains, “was to mock or cheat him.”

Thus the devil and his retinue entice us with the lie of worldly gain, grabbed at by the peasants and burghers in the foreground, who tussle over tufts of dried grass like bargain hunters on Black Friday. Bottom right, a fat friar sits guzzling ale as nuns stuff a sack with armfuls of hay purloined from the wagon. To the left, a pope (identified by some scholars as the libertine Alexander VI, object of Savonarola’s scorn), an emperor, and his courtiers follow on horse-

hellscapes and outlandish teratological imagination is a little non-U; what’s really interesting are his landscapes and depictions of the hermit saints. Whether you consider this good taste or contrarianism, there is evidence to suggest that Bosch’s popularity in the sixteenth century rested on his infernal scenes as much as it does today. “People like the dark stuff, they always have,” Richard Charlton-Jones, formerly senior director of old-master paintings at Sotheby’s, London, told me. “If all he’d ever done was pictures of Paradise, the demand



would drop by half.” No one knows who commissioned *The Haywain*—or indeed most of the surviving works—but we can surmise, from an account written around 1560 by the Spanish humanist Felipe de Guevara, that Bosch was chiefly (and regrettably, in Guevara’s view) valued as an “inventor of monsters and chimeras.” At the foot of *The Haywain*’s right panel, a sinner’s bare legs protrude from the mouth of a fish-creature with stockinged human legs for fins: a palindrome made flesh. Above, a toad chews on a philanthropist’s privates while another naked figure, looking back toward the central panel as if there’s been some mistake, is

bundled off to his perdition by a bipedal deer and a fish-faced demon in a cowl and studded leather kilt. As Gibson points out, in terms of its complexity—and violence—the hellscape in *The Haywain* falls somewhere between the spare composition of *The River to Hell* panel, from the Palazzo Grimani in Venice, and the right-hand panels of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* and the Vienna *Last Judgment*.

Neither of these large-scale triptychs is on loan to the Noordbrabants, but fans of Bosch at his most fanciful may derive

some satisfaction from the Heaven and Hell cruise, which features scaled-up, rigid-foam models of some of the more notable monsters, mounted on the banks or emerging from the river like unspeakable things revealed by the recession of floodwaters. The afternoon I go, the 3-D projections of airborne demons and swarming bats are still pending on account of the actual bats hibernating in the tunnels, whose alarm at their own replication, let alone the megawattage of doomy music, is likely to prove more fatal to them than ours is to us. So no projections. It’s a lovely, cloudless day, cold



ists who controversially depicted the Prophet Mohammed in 2005.

"But Bosch did it in such a subtle way," he says.

This does get a laugh, but not the one that Groeneveld intended. We are drifting past a four-foot figurine of a pig in a nun's headdress. In Groeneveld's defense, while the import of Bosch's Hell scenes is anything but subtle, there is a delicacy in even his most fantastical figures, a minuteness of observation that intensifies their uncanniness by grounding it so firmly in reality. Reality duly reciprocates by seeming suddenly uncanny. ("At least some of the time," Joan Didion admits in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, "the world appears to me as a painting by Hieronymus Bosch.") There have, over the years, been a number of variably cockeyed attempts to prove that Bosch was a heretic, the weirdness of his imagery explicable only as a form of pictorial samizdat, a coded appeal to fellow members of his sect. In the 1940s, Wilhelm Fraenger, a German art historian, claimed that Bosch was an Adamite, a medieval adherent of free love, on the basis that the goings-on in the central panel of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* look like so much fun that they couldn't possibly have any admonitory intent. More recently, Lymda Harris has argued that Bosch was a closet Cathar, ostensibly orthodox in his Catholicism but using his paintings to spread the gnostic heresy that earth was a literal Hell, presided over by Satan.

This is highly unlikely. Granted, so little is known about Bosch that it's hard categorically to disprove any theory about his intentions—although per contra you might argue that this leaves him especially vulnerable to sophistry. In the Middle Ages, membership of the Brotherhood of Our Lady was largely reserved for the nobility, and it's surely a mark of Bosch's popularity—and acceptability to the establishment—that he should have been made a sworn brother when the social status of the artist idled somewhere around that of the skilled laborer.

More conceivable: that he was a Catholic, devout and observant and without a trace of dissent, even on the brink of the Reformation; that he was a respectable and well-connected figure in the community. (We know, for example, that he married well, to Aleid van de Meervenne, the daughter of a more pros-

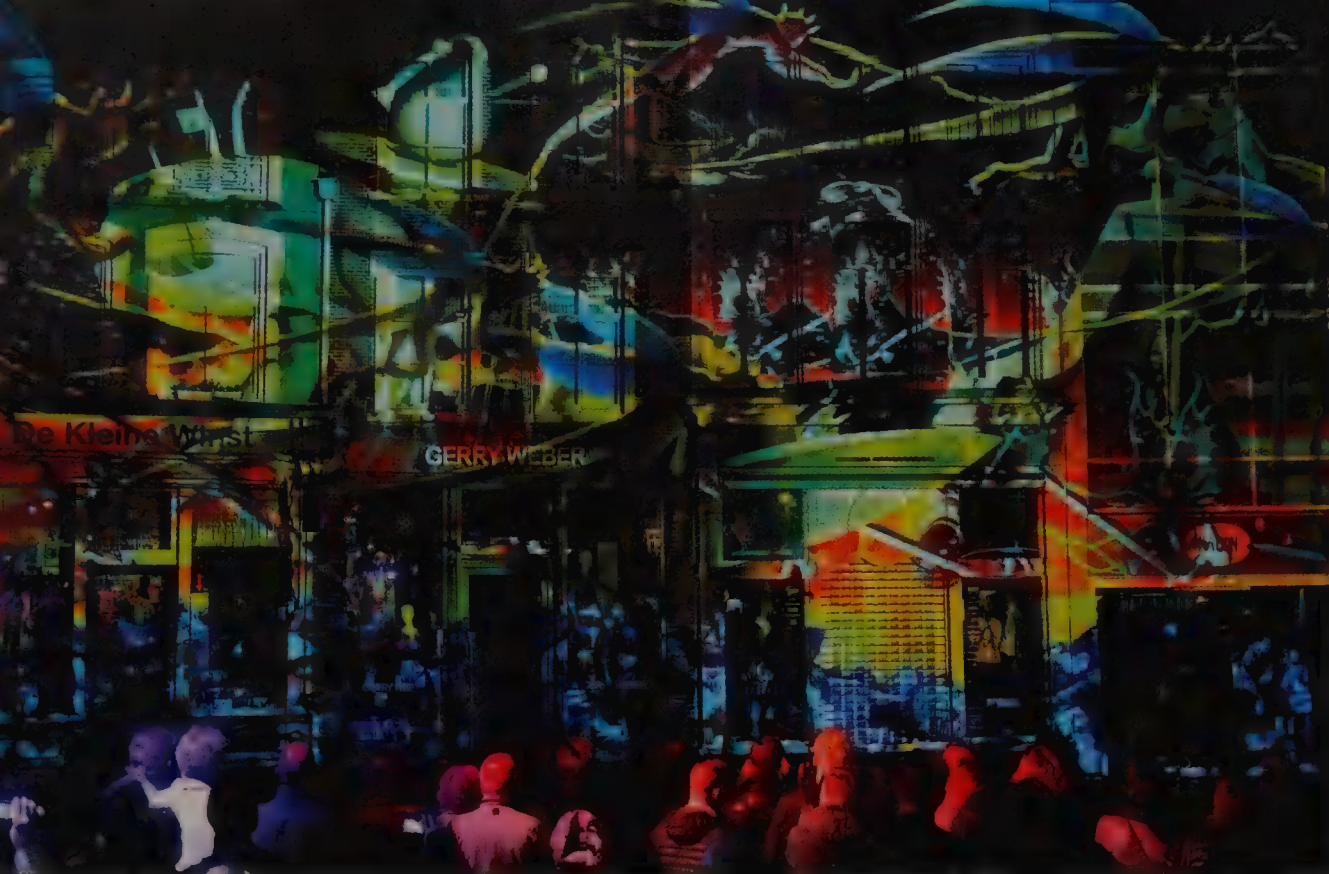
perous family than the van Akens.) As Gibson notes, 's Hertogenbosch in the early sixteenth century was home to a remarkable number of convents and monasteries. "By 1526, just ten years after Bosch's death, one out of every nineteen persons in 's Hertogenbosch belonged to a religious order, a much higher proportion than can be found in other Netherlandish cities at that time." Many of these foundations competed with the local crafts guilds in the sale of textiles and other goods, and in the light of the ill feeling this caused, it's possible to square Bosch's scathing treatment of religious figures with an entirely orthodox submission to church doctrine. Corrupt monks were fair game.

What marked him out was not creed but temperament, and the talent to express it. It's not wholly true to say that Bosch's mutant iconography is unique, a conceptual isolate. Scholars point to the likely influence of medieval manuscript illuminators, filling their margins with improbable bestiaries. Gibson maintains that the tetchy-looking, spoon-billed demon in the Vienna *Last Judgment*, carrying a bow and the sinner it's just shot suspended from a pole, is a variation on a common motif. Other monsters may have been visualizations of Dutch proverbs or folkloric tropes now lost to us. Where Bosch does break fresh ground, other than in integrating these grotesques into large-scale compositions, is in the clarity of execution and level of invention he brings to the task. The thistle-headed, half-avian falconer-demon in the Lisbon *Temptation of St. Anthony*, armored from the waist



down and riding a four-legged earthenware pot, is typical in being a freakish amalgamation of everyday elements, acutely observed, like a mix-and-match

and clear as a new contact-lens prescription. From somewhere in a leafless tree a crow opens his throat in casual commentary. We drift past a pair of giant ears bisected by a six-foot carving knife. On the near side a black demon is dragging a naked sinner into the auditory canal. I think about screaming in horror, but it is too tranquil even to joke about the incongruity. A member of the boat party asks Hugo Groeneveld, our skipper and guide, why Bosch's excoriation of religious figures hadn't seen him tried for blasphemy. Groeneveld draws a comparison with the Danish cartoon-



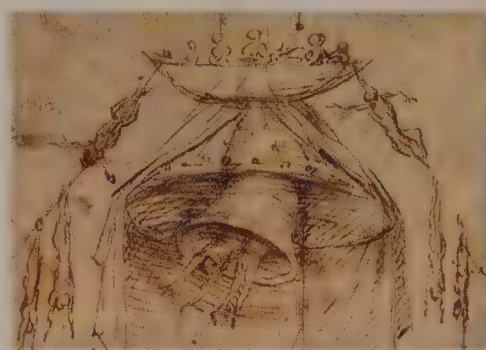
for what Bosch can teach us in this time of fear. *What have I done to deserve this?*

Word is that it's a jinx. Hieronymus making himself known. Next door to the collapsed building is the house where he lived as a child. It's practically unharmed, the neighboring structure having sheared away cleanly, leaving the shared wall exposed but for some remnants of plasterboard. (I'm reminded of the bombed-out second-story bedroom in Billy Collins's poem "Build-

flip-book of nature illustrations. Bosch takes an orthodox idea—that Hell represents the inversion of the God-given natural order—and develops it as an artist might, freely, not by the lights of a heretical agenda, or under the influence, as some have suggested, of the natural hallucinogen ergot. The "Tree-Man" in the Hell panel of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*—hollow tree trunks for legs, boats for feet, broken egg for a torso with a tavern scene going on inside it—is frightening precisely because of the deal it strikes between wild invention and the sad, instantly identifiable reality of the figure's near-apologetic facial expression, aimed directly at us. We feel pity for a man with a pub in his guts. (See page 68.) Bosch is frequently funny, as in his tolling bell with human clappers in the *Infernal Landscape* drawing, but like other masters of the comic-metamorphic—Saul Steinberg, say—he is a moralist, and a baleful one at that, unwavering in his certainty that all hope is in vain, that none but the very most ascetic will be spared, that the rest of us are headed to Hell in a hay cart.

Five days before Bosch by Night is meant to start, one of the buildings to be used as a backdrop collapses. As in, utterly. At the time of writing, it's still not clear why, but some superficial renovation work was taking place in the optician's office that occupied the ground floor. Shortly after ten that night, the last construction worker

left the building, which a neighboring shop's CCTV shows collapsing at 10:52. It's a Saturday night on the corner of Markt and Hinthamerstraat, a main drag full of shops and bars and restaurants. Amazingly, no one is hurt. There's an unsubstantiated rumor going around that a guy was in the lighting rig at the time, running tests, and had just projected an image on the building when the façade fell off and the interior dissolved into rubble, which if true must



have freaked said technician the hell out. Anyhow, it's an astounding piece of bad luck for JB500. You might have thought, having spent nearly nine years preparing your festival, and six months creating your light show, the one thing to rely on would be the 400-year-old building you're planning to use as a screen. It's hard not to imagine Mayor Rombouts sitting in pressed pajamas on the edge of his bed, uncradled receiver purring beside him, numb to Mrs. Rombouts's tender hand on his shoulder. My tourist spendings, he's saying. My hopes

ing with Its Face Blown Off," its wallpaper "exposed to the lightly falling snow/as if the room had answered the explosion/wearing only its striped pyjamas.") To the extent that any town in the Netherlands is still Christian, Den Bosch is notably Catholic, with a subsoil of Marian mystery under its briskly secular surface. At a press conference on the day Bosch by Night was due to open, Lian Duif, putting on a brave face, is delivering the happy news that the Bosch house is okay, when, precisely on the words "is still standing," a waitress drops a coffee cup and a large stack of crockery goes crashing to the floor. A big laugh goes up, tinged with unmistakable unease. (It's at this press conference, incidentally, that I finally get to try a *Bossche bol*. It is nothing other than a massive profiterole, which makes me wonder if other middling cities on the make might choose their own public-domain pastry to supersize and lay claim to, like the four-foot cream horn of Gary, Indiana.)

The initial plan is to erect a screen in front of the disaster site so the light show can go ahead—and, of course, so that the shame of the wreckage can be hidden from view. At a preview of the Bosch by Night projections, shown indoors on the evening of the canceled premiere, Mo Assem, one of the young animators behind the project, speaks of his team's inconsolability. "It's as if *our* painting is now missing, someone's destroyed it." Again, at the time of writing,

Top: Photograph of the Bosch by Night projections in 's Hertogenbosch by Caspar Claassen
Bottom: Detail from *Infernal Landscape*, date unknown. Courtesy Het Noordbrabants Museum, 's Hertogenbosch, and the Bosch Research and Conservation Project



no one is sure when the screen will go up, but in the meantime it's tempting to view the pile of rubble it will eventually conceal as the Hell panel of a gargantuan triptych. (In the event, the show is shifted two façades to the right, avoiding Markt altogether.)

Leave the disaster site and return to the Noordbrabants. One of the triumphs of Visions of Genius is in reuniting the fragments of the *Wayfarer* triptych, which, since it was sawn into bits at some point in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, have been exhibited as separate paintings. Looking at *The Ship of Fools*, once part of the left-hand panel, it's remarkable to recall that Bosch was an almost exact contemporary of Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519).

A man is steering an overcrowded boat with an outsized wooden spoon, or would be if he weren't more intent on biting into a spherical cake, suspended like an apple from a string. An old nun and a friar are singing along to the lascivious pleasing of a lute. A drunkard vomits over the bow under the watchful eye of an eerily diminutive jester, perched in the rigging and sipping from a cup.

As Paula Nuttall, an associate lecturer at the Courtauld Institute, pointed out when I met her, "Folly is equated with sin in this period. It's not just, oh, you're a bit stupid. Folly is *bad*." Far from the humanist ideal established the other side of the Alps, Bosch's *Ship of Fools* shares the late-medieval negativity of its namesake and possible source, *Das Narrenschiff* (1494), a verse satire by the German poet Sebastian Brant. Man is not the measure of all things but of lust, corruption, and drunkenness, Vi-

truvian Man bent over the handrail, losing his lunch. A similar defeatism might be read into the central panel of the Vienna *Last Judgment*. Compared with Rogier van der Weyden's *Beaune Altarpiece*, painted at least thirty years earlier, the *Judgment's* Christ and the chosen few entrants to heaven—twelve, to be precise—take up a tiny portion of a picture plane mostly given over to an earth indistinguishable from Hell. Righteousness is a fringe characteristic.

The case for Bosch as an exemplar of the Northern Renaissance—argued, without a great deal of evidence, by Waldemar Januszczak, in his recent BBC takedown of Giorgio Vasari—is further weakened by the artist's technical peculiarities. Again, the comparison with his early Netherlandish forebears is instruc-

tive. A painting like *The Descent from the Cross*, across the way from *The Garden of Earthly Delights* in the Prado, shows Rogier van der Weyden building up tone through the meticulous layering of oil glazes, creating, as Nuttall puts it, "this wonderful, glowing, jewel-like perfection" and colors that are "almost porcelain-smooth." The thinness of Bosch's painting, by contrast, is evident in the former right-hand panel of the *Wayfarer* triptych, known as *Death and the Miser*, wherein traces of underdrawing are clearly visible. At some point between preparation and painting Bosch has evidently decided that the bag of money in the dying miser's hand would be better proffered by the nasty



little demon at his bedside—rendering, incidentally, the composition marginally more optimistic. In that millimetric shift Bosch has given the miser one last chance to repent.

The emphasis, in much of Bosch's work, is on compositional intricacy, "the same urge for universality," in Gibson's phrase, "that we encounter in the façade sculptures of a Gothic cathedral," as opposed to the elevation of the individual to godlike gorgeousness. That said, for all that his eschatological gloom and decorative, unsculptural figuration locate Bosch firmly in the Middle Ages, there are elements in his painting that prefigure later periods. Gibson claims that the "iconographical programme" of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*—the giant birds, the profusion of fruit, the guy with a posy of flowers shoved up his backside—plays to the "Renaissance taste for highly original ... allegories whose full meaning is apparent only to a limited audience." (Others might argue that elaborate pictorial cryptography is a defining characteristic of medieval art.)

Some of Bosch's backgrounds anticipate subsequent advances in landscape painting. Richard Charlton-Jones considers Bosch's landscapes "the most original and overlooked" element in his work. Landscape painting would not become an independent genre until later in the sixteenth century; had it existed earlier, Paula Nuttall believes, Bosch might well have been considered a pioneer. "If you just zoomed in on his landscape backgrounds and clipped them into a PowerPoint," she told me, "you could probably persuade your audience that they were looking at something much later."

Closed, the wings of the *Wayfarer* triptych would have revealed the eponymous tondo, now a stand-alone panel loaned by the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam. Our ragged protagonist, possibly corresponding to *Elckerlijc*, a Dutch counterpart of Everyman, turns to look at the tavern he has

just passed, a dilapidated fleapit with the "secret, bestial" air of Jan van Hogspeuw's watering hole in Philip Larkin's "The Card-Players." A couple canoodle in the



doorway as a hunched figure voids his bladder against the outside wall. A cur snaps at the wayfarer's heels. Above, in a tree, an owl—a figure for evil, not wisdom, and recurrent in Bosch's paintings—aims a hungry gaze at a blue tit on a lower branch. (In *St. Jerome at Prayer*, on loan from the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent, recent restoration has disclosed a second, smaller owl lurking in a rocky niche nearby. "Little owl is looking at the big owl, and the big owl is looking at you," explains Ron Spronk, a technical art historian and member of the Bosch Research Project. "It's an indirect owl." That is, big owl has got your number, and little owl has his: a mise en abyme of highly prejudicial surveillance that doesn't do my fragile self-composure any favors at all.) We are in no doubt as to where the wayfarer's path will lead him, but the presiding mood of despair is lifted, or at least leavened, by the

tenderness of the landscape in the background, rendered in hazy grays and yellow-green. We are transported even as we are warned; it's one of the loveliest passages of painting in the exhibition, as subdued and contemplative as a Morandi.

In heavy rain I leave the museum and walk through Markt on my way to the station. Brush and palette in hand, August Falise's 1929 bronze statue of Bosch turns its back on the fenced-off disaster site, either in disgust or denying involvement. I have some time to kill, but in the rain the brightly lit shops on Hinthamerstraat—America Today ("The College Lifestyle Brand"), a sports-shoe store called the Athlete's Foot, in seeming innocence—are especially depressing, and I retire to a bar on the altogether more gezellig Korenbrugstraat. ("Gezellig" is a supposedly untranslatable term that seems pretty straightforward to translate: it means "cozy, welcoming.") Tapperij Het Veulen is the sort of traditional, dark-wood *bruincafé* where the beer tastes better for the visual impression that you're submerged in it. Even the air looks brown. The place is empty but for a couple of silent men at one end of the bar. I buy a Jupiler and am presented with a bowl of monkey nuts whose shells I am instructed, I think, to throw on the floor, not leave on the table. So I sit there, exposed to myself, munching on nuts as a mess of pitted shell fragments grows around my feet, afflicted by the suspicion that I've misunderstood, that I've got things exactly the wrong way round, and some sort of punishment is coming. ■



Top: *The Wayfarer*, c. 1500 © Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, the Netherlands/Bridgeman Images. Bottom: Detail from *St. Jerome at Prayer*, c. 1500. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent, Belgium, and the Bosch Research and Conservation Project

FOUR IN PROSE

By Diane Williams

I.

THE PERVERTED MESSAGE

The sky was roseate at the end of the day, in the east rather than in the west—all wrong—when I encountered a mother and her small child who behaved as if they believed in each other.

The mother had irregular features and a rough complexion. The girl wore a pretty cap—blueberry blue—and they both had consumed only a few bites of their food.

They tapped instead at an activity-book page. "The clock doesn't have a face!" the mother said. "Stay with Bunny while Mommy pays."

I'm afraid the child's toy rabbit had once been fat or puffed up and now it was just skin and bone and unsmiling.

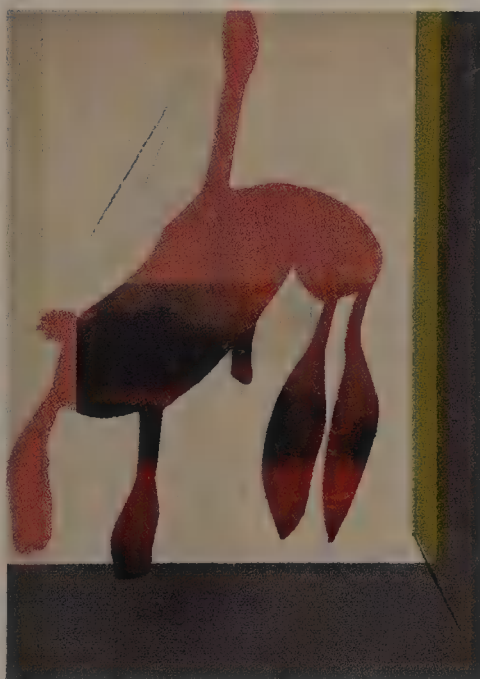
Except that this was such a tender spectacle—perhaps because I am in love these days and I have recently gotten a better hold of Mr. Rottblatt, and he me, elderly though we are.

A café employee was sweeping near the girl, who had dropped her toy. He lifted up her pal by its arm and he laughed. The child bawled.

We heard a blusterous reprimand from across the room and the mother rushed back to pry the toy's arm loose from the man.

The rabbit was coarsened through use, thoroughly soiled, although evi-

Diane Williams's most recent book of fiction is Fine, Fine, Fine, Fine, Fine. She is the founder and editor of the literary annual NOON.



dently suitable to carry around and to really chew on.

I slept well that night. The sky was white when we awoke and showed no significant departure in color from the norm.

It was a Spot the Difference puzzle that the mother and the daughter had been fixed upon, displaying two pictures that at first glance appeared to be the same.

Alas, there was no end to the girl's obtuseness. She was unamazed by the missing pot of geraniums, by merely one button, only one eyeball, and no ice cream.

But how faithfully the mother urged her lamb to see.

II.

HAPPY PRESENCE, TIMELESS INSPIRATION

Perhaps the wife is well enough acquainted with her husband's finer qualities and with his practical knowledge, his contributions to their welfare. Now if only she would ever smile at him.

Yet anybody watching guests entering their home could see that the husband bows slightly. He is courtly and he is constantly like this.

In the aftermath, he remembers the compliment—or was it an insult?—that he received: "Oh, how you look like who you are!"

And, while his wife sleeps, he leaves the bed to go to a sofa he likes that is covered in old shawls—first putting on his thick robe. Just a few steps bring him closer to the cushions and to some clutter on a sideboard, including dahlias in a mug.

Surely there was something good enough here, or possibly classic.

The telephone rang. It was too late for a call. He didn't answer it.

"Who was it?" His wife appeared.

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"I didn't answer it."

"You didn't answer it?"

He placed his hands together—not entirely, only the fingertips—and pulled them back apart.

"Why are you smiling?" his wife said.

"It's a sneer."

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III. THE HOURS OF COINCIDENCE

I got help hoisting my saddlebag's cross strap over my head and some cooperation so I could get out of my heavy pelerine and then up onto their sofa with my thoughts for achieving a purpose.

"Please, if you don't mind," Earlene said. "Well, now look at you!" She had crossed the room to ask me questions that I knew all the answers to, but somebody sighing, who also listened to me, begged to differ.

And they had put the food out, so I got up to follow Sol, who was carrying his shot glass, and we passed a mahogany stand with cloth-covered books on it. I picked up *Florence Nightingale*.

"The buffet!" Sol called to me, for I hadn't moved ahead with him and had lingered alongside the long mirrors—or are those windows?—through which you can see the world or honeysuckles or whatever it is that they call it.

An edge of the carpet may have been bent up, which was why my Sol fell. Of a sudden, his head was down, face-first—way over there in the corner of the floor.

He was breathing, but nothing else.

"Talk to me!" the old lady at the hospital said to him. I was the old lady.

I didn't want to spoil anything, so I gave him no assistance with the questions—with what was his name, our address, or with where are you now.

He said, "Who are you?" and "What?"—inquiries that I answered. But a nurse named Cliantha kindly corrected me because I was supposed to make my replies much more interesting.

I had never realized that before.

IV. DON'T TALK TO HIM FOR SUCH A LONG TIME

In due course, Arthur Churl took some of my ideas, but he had his own angle—he was effecting a sort of spiritual awakening. He had produced an outdoor living room—lounge chairs, a dining set, an umbrella.

He said, "Sure you don't want that yellow bush?" It was a peculiar bush with yellow leaves—not as if the leaves were wilting.

"Do we want a yellow bush?" I asked my wife, who was waiting for me in the car. "It's a light-yellow color—"

"I don't like those kinds of bushes," she said. "And don't talk to him for such a long time. We have other things to do today."

I found Churl looking hopeful. He had that row of—not a row, a couple of bushes with yellow leaves.

He raised his arms upward into a V position while I took some pleasure in the wider view from the inviting grass path of his garden.

As for my wife, no fatal clash with her or disgrace yet, and we did continue on to make our stops on schedule, including the one at the picnic grove.

The light of day may send out its messenger with guidance for us.

At the top of a hackberry, I saw a bird that then pounced, landing near our chips with his big mouth open, only sitting and then rising—no beating of his wings. The bird arose, cheeping something I'd heard many times before, the barest basics, *bare basics*. ■

NEW BOOKS

By Christine Smallwood



Across the seven volumes of the *Recherche*, Proust mentions only one living artist by name—the fashion designer Mariano Fortuny. “Is it their historical character, or is it rather the fact that each one of them is unique,” Marcel wonders about Fortuny’s creations,

that gives them so special a significance that the pose of the woman who is wearing one while she waits for you to appear or while she talks to you assumes an exceptional importance, as though

the costume had been the fruit of a long deliberation and your conversation was somehow detached from everyday life like a scene in a novel?

Marcel buys many presents for his captive lover, Albertine, but when she leaves she takes with her only the blue Fortuny cloak.

Granadan by birth and Venetian by palazzo, Fortuny dressed royalty, nobility, and the likes of Eleanora Duse, Isadora Duncan, and Peggy Guggenheim. He specialized

in unstructured, pleated, and often sheer gowns that were meant to be worn over a shift or, in the bedroom, nothing at all. They liberated women from the asphyxiation of whalebone, but their hemlines, which reached four to six inches in front of the toes, made perambulation a challenge. Susan Sontag, who in life always wore pants, found the perfect occasion for a Fortuny. She wore one to her funeral.

Fortuny appears as the lesser-known half of a patient, delighting, and pen-



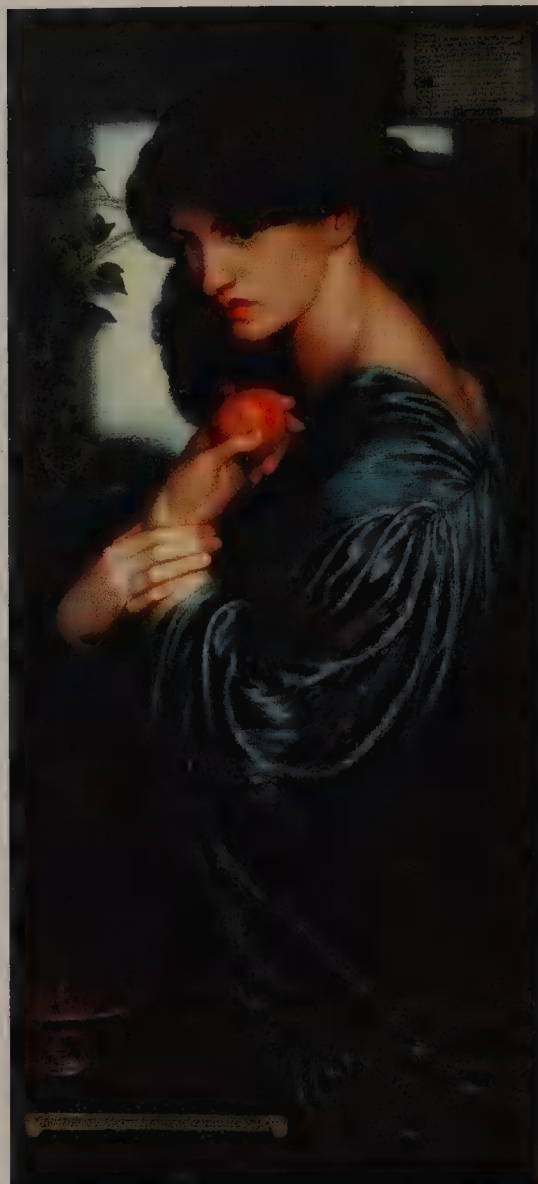
etrating book-length essay by A. S. Byatt, *PEACOCK & VINE: ON WILLIAM MORRIS AND MARIANO FORTUNY* (Knopf, \$26.95). The English socialist and the cosmopolitan aristocrat were born forty years apart and had a little in common: both were craftsmen and inventors; both experimented with fabrics and vegetable dyes; both specialized in crowded but well-ordered patterns of birds, fruit, fronds, creepers, and acanthus; and both were “obsessive workers” who “made the place where they lived identical with the place where they worked.” What Morris and Fortuny really share, however, is that they both obsess Byatt.

She identifies intriguing points of connection, nodes that branch into enlightening contrasts, rather like Morris’s Peacock and Dragon pattern, whose swooping curves simultaneously

hide and reveal the motions of its strutting, slithering creatures. Take, for example, the two artists' shared interest in the *Nibelungenlied*, the medieval German epic on which Wagner's Ring cycle is based. Fortuny—who also designed sets and lighting for the composer—made a brooding, deliriously romantic painting of Siegmund and Sieglinde clasped in each other's arms, with a muscled Sieglinde wrapped in "agitated transparent veiling." In his garden, Morris clipped Fafnir the dragon into a prim, orderly topiary.

That shrub still embellishes the grounds of Kelmscott Manor, the property that Morris leased with a friend, the Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Morris said he hoped for Kelmscott to be a retreat for his family, but, as Byatt puts it, "He was perhaps also trying to find somewhere where" the romance between Rossetti and Morris's wife, Jane, "would be less visible." The two had a long affair, and Rossetti made her the subject of fifty-seven studies, "always with the same large, red, hungry, mournful mouth." Henry James recalled meeting the Morris-es in 1868—William reciting poetry in "his flowing antique numbers" and Jane, with her "Swinburnian eyes" and "great thick black oblique brows," reclining on the sofa, "this dark silent medieval woman with her medieval toothache." According to James, Rossetti's portraits only seemed "strange and unreal" until you saw the woman in the flesh.

In their investigations of old and even ancient craft techniques, Fortuny and Morris were restlessly innovative. In addition to making bursting, sylvan wallpapers and textiles and writing novels, poems, and essays, Morris embroidered, created typefaces, and invented a special paper for his printing press. Fortuny, who was also a painter and photographer, took out more than fifty patents. For the theater, he invented a method of reflecting lighting that allowed him to "compose the setting onstage, conducting light as one conducts music." (It is thanks to him that lighting artists sit in



special booths.) He also designed furniture, lamps, a new kind of photographic paper, and tools; none of this, however, mitigated accusations that he was a copyist who stole patterns from religious garments and ancient Greek artifacts.

Peacock & Vine eschews argument for anecdote, lush description, and telling juxtaposition. Byatt quotes the scholar Peter Collier, for whom the issue of Fortuny's originality is quite beside the point. As Collier puts it, Proust "sets his derivative dress-designer, Fortuny, at the apex of creativity," making him, like the phoenix, an emblem for the recovery of time.

These Fortuny gowns, one of which I had seen Mme de Guermantes wearing, were those of which Elstir, when he told us about the magnificent garments of the women of Carpaccio's and Titian's day, had prophesied the

imminent return, rising from their ashes, as magnificent as of old, for everything must return in time, as it is written beneath the vaults of St. Mark's, and proclaimed, as they drink from the urns of marble and jasper of the Byzantine capitals, by the birds which symbolise at once death and resurrection.

Rebirth, like self-invention, is a privilege, and can be withheld by political forces. When Raden Saleh, the Javanese painter, returned to the Dutch East Indies in 1851—after more than twenty years of hobnobbing with European royals whom he allowed to believe that he, too, was royalty—he shrank from the necessity of appearing at the Dutch colonial court in "native costume." He wrote to King Willem III of the Netherlands for a dispensation, suggesting that instead of going shirtless in a sarong, he might wear a Western uniform, as the Javanese officers of the Dutch army did. Specifically, Raden Saleh asked to be allowed to wear a "fantasy uniform," the garb of the Batavian civil-defense cavalry, "which is worn neither by the Dutch nor by the Dutch Indian military." Besides, he added, if he were to appear in the local garb, how could he wear the decoration that Willem had awarded him, the medal of a knight of the Oak Crown?

As Jamie James notes in *THE GLAMOUR OF STRANGENESS: ARTISTS AND THE LAST AGE OF THE EXOTIC* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$27) a "fantasy uniform" is a potent metaphor not only for Raden Saleh's fantasy identity but for the insupportable position of the "educated native" under a colonial regime. I am grateful to James, without whom I would never have learned the story of Raden Saleh's life—a life that also has the contours of a fantasy. One of six "exotes," James's grand word for exotic-seeking expats across the late nineteenth and the twentieth century, Raden Saleh studied orientalist painting in the Netherlands and brought it to Saxony, where it failed to catch fire. More influential was his importation of modern European art, or at least a European sense of aesthetic detachment,

to Java. His 1863 canvas *Drinking Tiger* subordinates the animal to “the primordial majesty of the land”; it was the first painting by a Javanese artist to make the forest its main subject. “In the context of Javanese art,” James writes, “*Drinking Tiger* is as revolutionary as *Olympia*.”

James’s other main characters are white artists, musicians, and writers who fled an arid, suffocating Europe for the dream of an honest, immediate, sensuous life in Tahiti, Indonesia, China, North Africa, or Haiti. They all lived colorful lives—and all came to colorful ends:

Paul Gauguin died at fifty-four of tertiary syphilis, crippled by bleeding chancres and almost blind; Raden Saleh died of a broken heart after he was insulted and abused by the government in his native land; Walter Spies drowned within sight of land, locked in a cage aboard a sinking ship; Victor Segalen, forty-one, died in a freakish walking accident at a time when he felt life slowly abandoning him; Isabelle Eberhardt died in a flash flood in the Sahara.

His last figure, Maya Deren, the experimental filmmaker and voodoo adherent, died of a brain hemorrhage

at forty-four. James suggests a poor diet and amphetamine use as the causes, but those of Deren’s friends who saw her possessed, including Stan Brakhage, believed that she had been put under a curse. (Her lover Teiji Ito, who was eighteen years her junior—Deren met him in a Greenwich Village movie theater when he was a teenage runaway—thought that she died “of anger.”)

The Glamour of Strangeness contains wonderful episodes and a memorable cast, and James’s reminder that colonial encounters sometimes involved amicable and eager exchange, and not merely force and exploitation, is well taken. But the book is marred by needless, showy digressions and unwelcome authorial intrusions. The writing is bloated with infelicitous imagery—“The record of Raden Saleh’s early life is spotted with lacunae, like the pages of an old book in the tropics tenanted by bookworms”—and James’s repeated description of homosexuality as “Greek games” is first cute, then grating.

In his desire to recuperate the complexities of expatriation, James takes tedious jabs at feminist and post-colonialist critics who have questioned the power dynamics involved in, for example, Gauguin abandoning his wife and taking pubescent lovers; that James is an American expat who settled in Indonesia explains his investment in the subject, but it makes the book feel less intimate than defensive. He argues, with some persuasiveness, that his exotes should be considered visionary, even great, artists and not simply interesting adventurers. Walter Spies, he writes, is not famous because he didn’t want to be; Victor Segalen’s *Réne Leys* is a “pioneering work” of modernism on par with *The Castle*. “Don’t they know,” he quotes Borges as saying,

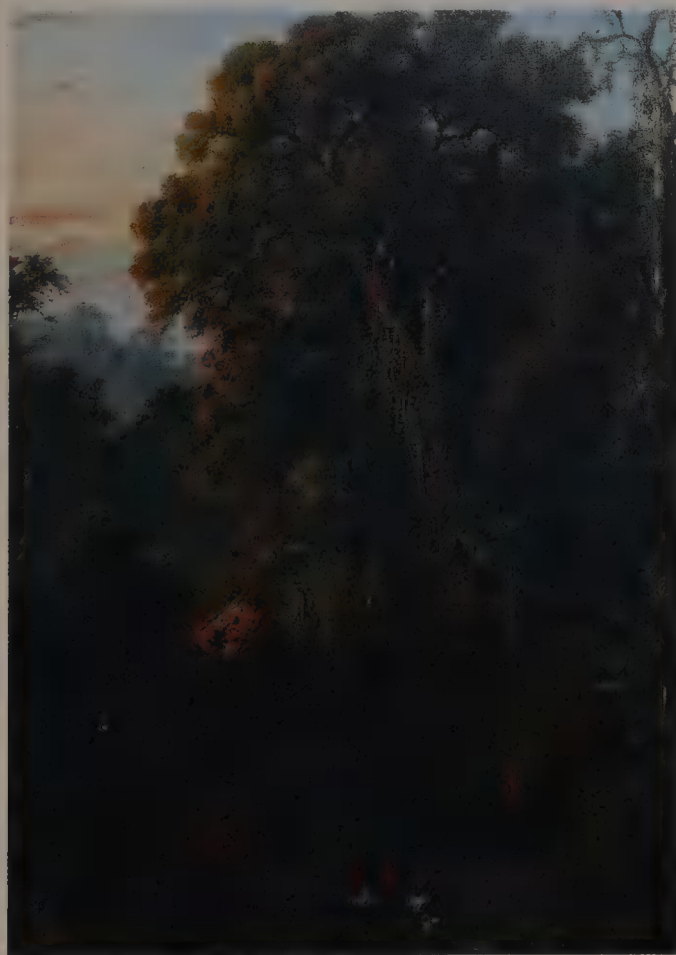
“that in Victor Segalen they have one of the most intelligent writers of our age, perhaps the only one to have made a fresh synthesis of Western and Eastern aesthetics and philosophy?”

An indisputable, though often overlooked, pioneer of modernism is Alfred Döblin, the German writer and neurologist best known for the novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. As Günter Grass said ten years after Döblin’s death,

The word “Kafkaesque” escapes our lips the moment we run into any bureaucratic difficulty. Our Brechtomaniacs can be easily recognized by their German-word-compounding-inclinations. Only Alfred Döblin occasions no conferences, rarely tempts our industrious literature professors into exegesis, seduces few readers.

The situation has improved a bit—more people know Döblin, if only from Fassbinder’s harrowing fifteen-hour adaptation of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. Yet remarkably, **BRIGHT MAGIC: STORIES** (NYRB Classics, \$15.95), translated by Damion Searls, is the first publication of Döblin’s short fiction in English. Perhaps we can now make “Döblinesque” happen. The collection’s early work is marked by a deranged psychological perspectivism, hairpin plots motivated by passion and sadism, and an abundance of murders and suicides. In the later stories, however, we find a curious, gentle whimsy, a predilection for the humorously fabular or the folkloric, and a passionate interest in the inner lives of animals. And always a courtship of the absurd, and language that is as vivid as Technicolor and as jarring as a car crash.

My favorite story in *Bright Magic* is “The Other Man.” It begins when a Boston gynecologist named Dr. Converdon hires a blond secretary named Mery, who has “beautiful braids.” He sleeps with her and discovers, to his dismay, that she is a virgin. Converdon’s behavior becomes erratic and brutal. He forces Mery to dance in a cabaret so that other men can ogle her; Mery enjoys the performance, but he doesn’t allow her to do it again—instead, he marries her. Shortly thereafter,



Converdon receives a letter from an acrobat named Wheatstren, declaring his love for Mery and advising Converdon to save everyone a lot of hassle by killing himself. After considering the matter, Converdon consents. Wheatstren tires of Mery and pimps her out at the racecourse and the theater. This is the last line: "She, however, praised him at every turn, because he offered her the greatest thing that there is on earth: considerable variety." It's a love story.

Döblin is a true master—a scientist and a mystic whose characters, battered by a senseless world, cling to what today we would call existence or integrity but what he would have called the soul. They are alternately crude and fragile, suckers and saints. They hope and dream in excess of reason but are tethered to solid ground. In the very funny "Traffic with the Beyond," a society of spiritualists is duped by a murderer. The fable "Materialism," written after the author's conversion to Catholicism, tracks the havoc unleashed when nature, including bulls, the grass, and water, learns of the primacy of matter. "Everything we do is meaningless," thinks the tiger. "How could I have been so blind. It's chemical reactions and reflexes wherever you look. . . . I started a family and brought seven rascals into the world for this. It's sobering. A waste of time."

If the tigers can't go on, how can we? I am reminded of the prologue of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, in which Döblin writes, in characteristic jagged shards, that his hero's life will be given "this awful thing . . . meaning." In *Bright Magic*, especially in the early dark stories, lives acquire meaning in the grimmest way, by flailing toward death. In "The Sailing Trip," a woman returns to the scene of a fatality to drown herself. In "The Canoness and Death," an old maid becomes aware of her impending demise; eventually Death jumps into her bed and drags her out the window. In "The Murder of a Buttercup," a man cuts down flowers on a hillside, crazily atones for his offense, and goes out again, wielding his black walking stick like a scythe. There is no phoenix in the landscape, and nothing rises from the ashes. ■

DON THE REALTOR

The rise of Trump

By Martin Amis

Discussed in this essay:

Trump: The Art of the Deal, by Donald Trump with Tony Schwartz. Ballantine Books. 384 pages. \$16.99.

Crippled America: How to Make America Great Again, by Donald Trump. Threshold Editions. 208 pages. \$25.

Not many facets of the Trump apparition have so far gone unexamined, but I can think of a significant loose end. I mean his sanity: what is the prognosis for his mental health, given the challenges that lie ahead? We should bear in mind, at this point, that the phrase "Power corrupts" isn't just a metaphor.

There have been one or two speculative attempts to get Donald to hold still on the couch. Both Ted Cruz and Bernie Sanders have called him a "pathological liar," but so have many less partial observers. They then go on to ask: Is his lying merely compulsive, or is he an outright mythomaniac, constitutionally unable to distinguish non-truth from truth—rather like those "horrible human beings," journalists (or at least spiteful, low-echelon journalists), who, Trump claims, "have no concept of the difference between 'fact' and 'opinion'"? PolitiFact has ascertained that Donald's mendacity rate is just over 90 percent; so the man who is forever saying that he "tells it like it is" turns out to be nearly always telling it like it isn't.

With greater resonance, and with more technical garnish (lists of symptoms and giveaways), Trump has been identified as a "pathological narcissist," a victim, in fact, of narcissistic personality disorder (or N.P.D.). Certainly Trump's self-approbation goes well beyond everyday egocentricity or solipsism. "My fingers," he recently explained, "are long and beautiful, as, it has been well documented, are various other parts of my anatomy." He

Martin Amis has published fourteen novels, most recently *The Zone of Interest* and *Lionel Asbo*: State of England.

really does remind you of the original Narcissus, the frigid pretty boy of Greek myth who was mortally smitten by his own reflection. Narcissus is autoerotic; he is self-aroused.

Cynics will already be saying that these two "diseases"—chronic dishonesty and acute vaingloriousness—are simply par for the course. In recent years the G.O.P. has more or less adopted the quasi slogan "There is no downside to lying" (itself a clear and indeed "performative" tall tale: how can you debauch truth, and debauch language, without cost?). And such voices would also argue that a laughably bloated sense of self is a prerequisite, a sine qua non, for anyone aspiring to public office. Well, we'll see. President Trump won't get away with too much pathological lying in the Oval Office and the Situation Room. But we may be sure that his pathological narcissism, his poor old N.P.D., will become unrecognizably florid and fulminant once alloyed with what Maxim Gorky—referring to its effects on his friend Lenin—called "the filthy venom" of prepotence. Even Lenin confessed that it "makes one's head spin."

Our psychological exam cries out for hard evidence. Now, the written word is always hard evidence; and I have before me "two books by Donald Trump." That phrase is offered advisedly, particularly the preposition "by." But we can be confident that Trump had *something* to do with their compilation: it very quickly emerges that he is one of nature's "reluctant" micro-managers, having discovered (oh, long, long ago) that every single decision will hugely benefit from his omni-



competence. “By” is tentative, and even the epithet “books” is open to question, because Trump always calls his books his “bestsellers.” Anyway, almost three decades separate *The Art of the Deal* (1987) and *Crippled America* (2015). I suppose a careful study of the intervening bestsellers—among them *Surviving at the Top* (1990), *How to Get Rich* (2004), *Think Like a Billionaire* (2004), *The Best Golf Advice I Ever Received* (2005), and *Think Big and Kick Ass in Business and Life* (2007)—might have softened the blow. As it is, I can report that in the past thirty years Trump, both cognitively and humanly, has undergone an atrocious decline.

Insofar as it is a memoir, *The Art of the Deal* resembles a rags-to-riches story from which the rags have been tastefully excised. Donald’s dad, Fred C. Trump, did the rags bit, be-

coming the man of the house at the age of eleven (Donald’s grandfather was “a hard liver and a hard drinker”); so it was Fred, toiling away in the outer boroughs, who shined shoes, delivered fruit, and hauled lumber. Even at sixteen, though, Trump Sr. was starting to get ahead, “building prefabricated garages for fifty dollars apiece.”

By the time Donald appeared, Fred was a grand master of what we would now call affordable housing; and little Donald was his father’s sidekick as together they toured the sites, checking up on builders, suppliers, and contractors, and intimidating penniless tenants when they fell behind on the rent. But “I had loftier dreams and visions,” Trump writes. Not for him the little redbrick boxes, nor yet the “three-story Colonials, Tudors, and Victorians” that Fred went on to erect. In the early 1970s, fortified by

that “small loan” from his father (\$1 million), Donald strode across the Brooklyn Bridge and started to traffic in unaffordable housing: skyscrapers.

If you have ever wondered what it’s like, being a young and avaricious teetotal German-American philistine on the make in Manhattan, then your curiosity will be quenched by *The Art of the Deal*. One of the drawbacks of phenomenal success, Trump ruefully notes, “is that jealousy and envy inevitably follow” (“I categorize [such people] as life’s losers”); but the present reader, at least, felt a gorgeous serenity when contemplating Trump’s average day. Nonnavigable permits, floor-area ratios, zoning approvals, rezoning approvals (“involving a dozen city and state agencies, as well as local community groups”), land-rights and air-rights purchases, property-tax abatements, handouts to politicians

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July's New and Noteworthy Fiction Selection

("very standard and accepted"), and, if push came to shove ("I'm not looking to be a bad guy when it isn't absolutely necessary"), coerced evictions.

On the other hand, think of all the exceptional human beings he is working with. Alan "Ace" Greenberg, CEO of Bear Stearns; Ivan Boesky, crooked arbitrageur; Arthur Sonnenblick, "one of the city's leading brokers"; Stephen Wynn, Vegas hotelier; Adnan Khashoggi, "Saudi billionaire" (and arms dealer); and Paul Patay, "the number-one food-and-beverage man in Atlantic City." And on top of all this there's Barron Hilton, "born wealthy and bred to be an aristocrat," and "a member of what I call the Lucky Sperm Club." (An ugly formulation, that: I respectfully advise Mr. Trump to settle on a more demotic alternative—the Lucky Scum Club, say.)

Then you have the social life. A sustaining can of tomato juice for lunch ("I rarely go out, because mostly, it's a waste of time"); a minimum of parties ("Frankly, I'm not too big on parties, because I can't stand small talk"); and an absolute minimum of hanging about in cocktail bars ("I don't drink, and I'm not very big on sitting around"). But of course there are treats and spreeds. Take the dinners. A dinner at St. Patrick's Cathedral with John Cardinal O'Connor and his "top bishops and priests." A dinner, chaired by Trump, for the Police Athletic League. A visit to Trenton "to attend a retirement dinner for a member of the New Jersey Casino Control Commission."

It is thus exhaustively established that Trump has a superhuman tolerance for boredom. What are his other commercial strengths? Nerve; tenacity; patience; an unembarrassable pushiness (indulgently known as chutzpah); a shrewd aversion to staking his own money; the aforementioned readiness, at a pinch, to play the villain; the ability to be "a screamer when I want to be" (but not when he senses that "screaming would only scare them off"); and the determination to "fight when I feel I'm being screwed." Above all, perhaps, his antennae are very sensitive to weakness. Looking to buy an old hotel in Midtown, Trump rejects the Biltmore, the Barclay, and the

Roosevelt as being "at least moderately successful," and goes instead for the "only one in real trouble," the Commodore, which he can pitch as "a loser hotel in a decaying neighborhood" and so flatten the price. Similarly, his long and apparently hopeless campaign to get Bonwit Teller, store and building, suddenly takes fire when he learns that its parent company has started "to experience very serious financial problems." And he gets Bonwit Teller. Perhaps that's the defining asset: a crocodilian nose for inert and preferably moribund prey.

Trump can sense when an entity is no longer strong enough or lithe enough to evade predation. He did it with that white elephant, the Grand Old Party, whose salaried employers never saw him coming, even when he was there, and whose ruins he now bestrides. The question is, Can he do it with American democracy?

And so we turn to *Crippled America: How to Make America Great Again*, a bestseller so recent that it includes a dig at Megyn Kelly. But first a word about the cover.

"Some readers," writes Trump sternly in his opening sentence, "may be wondering why the picture we used on the cover of this book is so angry and so mean looking." Only the other day, he "had some beautiful pictures taken"—pictures like the one that bedizens *The Art of the Deal*—in which he "looked like a very nice person"; and Trump's family implored him to pick one of those. But no. He wanted to look like a very sour person to reflect the "anger and unhappiness that I feel." And there he is in HD color, hammy scowling out from under an omelet of makeup and tanning cream (and from under the little woodland creature that sleeps on his head).

Harper's readers will now have to adjust themselves to a peculiar experiment with the declarative English sentence. Trump's written sentences are not like his spoken sentences, nearly all of which have eight or nine things wrong with them. His written, or dictated, sentences, while grammatically stolid enough, attempt something cannier: very often indeed, they lack the ingredient known as content. In this company, "I am what I am" and "What

Guaranteed the most comfortable pillow you'll ever own!"

How Well Did You Sleep Last Night?

Did you toss and turn all night? Did you wake up with a sore neck, head ache, or was your arm asleep? Do you feel like you need a nap even though you slept for eight hours? Just like you, I would wake up in the morning with all of those problems and I couldn't figure out why. Like many people who have trouble getting a good night's sleep, my lack of sleep was affecting the quality of my life. I wanted to do something about my sleep problems, but nothing that I tried worked.

The Pillow Was the Problem

I bought every pillow on the market that promised to give me a better night's sleep. After trying them all, with no success, I finally decided to invent one myself. I began asking everyone I knew what qualities they'd like to see in their "perfect pillow." Their responses included: "I'd like a pillow that never goes flat", "I'd like my pillow to stay cool" and "I'd like a pillow that adjusts to me regardless of my sleep position." After hearing everyone had the same problems that I did, I spent the next two years of my life inventing MyPillow.



Mike Lindell
Inventor & CEO
of MyPillow®



In the early days, Mike and his family spent countless hours hand-making each MyPillow. This hard work and dedication to "doing it right" helped MyPillow become a classic American success story.

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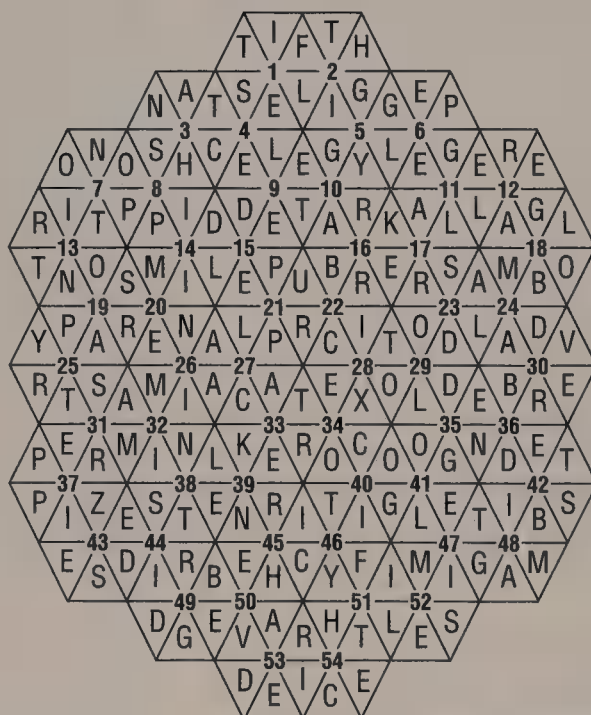
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I say is what I say" seem relatively rich. At first, you marvel at the people who think it worth saying—that what they say is what they say. But at least an *attitude* is being communicated, a subtext that reads, Take me for all in all. Incidentally, this attitude is exclusively male. You have heard Chris Christie say it; but can you hear a woman say, in confident self-extenuation, that she is what she is?

Fascinating. And maybe there's some legible sedimentary interest in "Donald Trump is for real." Or maybe not. As well as being "for real," Trump has "no problem telling it like it is." To put it slightly differently, "I don't think many people would disagree that I tell it like it is." He has already claimed that he *looks* like a very nice guy, on page ix, but on page xiv he elaborates with "I'm a really nice guy," and on page 89 he doubles down with "I'm a nice guy. I really am." "I'm not afraid to say exactly what I believe." "The fact is I give people what they need and deserve to hear ... and that is The Truth." See if you can find anything other than baseless assertion in this extract from the chapter "Our Infrastructure Is Crumbling":

In Washington, D.C., I'm converting the Old Post Office Building on Pennsylvania Avenue into one of the world's greatest hotels. I got the building from the General Services Administration (GSA). Many people wanted to buy it, but the GSA wanted to make sure whoever they sold it to had the ability to turn it into something special, so they sold it to me. I got it for four reasons. Number one—we're really good. Number two—we had a really great plan. Number three—we had a great financial statement. Number four—we're EXCELLENT, not just very good, at fulfilling or even exceeding our agreements. The GSA, who are true professionals, saw that from the beginning.

That's the way the country should be run.

Before we turn to the naked manifestations of advanced paranoia, we had better tick off the ascertainable planks in Trump's national platform; they are not policies, quite, more a jumble of positions and intentions. On climate change: he would instantly desist from any preventive action, which is

"just an expensive way of making tree-huggers feel good." On immigration: he tries to soften the edges, but the nativist battle cry is intact and entire ("Construction of the wall needs to start as soon as possible. And Mexico has to pay for it"). On health care: he would stoke up interstate competition among insurers, and let the market sort it all out. On governmental style: he would restore "a sense of dignity to the White House," bringing back the old "pomp and circumstance." On religion: "In business, I don't actively make decisions based on my religious beliefs," he writes, almost comatose with insincerity, "but those beliefs are there—big-time." On gun control: here, Trump quotes that famously controversial line about the necessity of "well regulated militias," and then appends the one-word paragraph, "Period."

But by now the one-word paragraph has taken up long-term residence in Trump's prose:

People say I don't provide specific policies... I know that's not the way the professional politicians do it... But there's nobody like me.

Nobody.

Or:

I have proven everybody wrong.
EVERYBODY!

If we agree that referring to yourself in the third person is not usually a sign of psychological well-being, how do we assess the following?

Donald Trump builds buildings.

Donald Trump develops magnificent golf courses.

Donald Trump makes investments that create jobs.

And Donald Trump creates jobs for legal immigrants and all Americans.

Well, Martin Amis thinks, for a start, that the author of *Crippled America* is a lot crazier than the author of *The Art of the Deal*.

Martin Amis is aware that *Crippled America* was published on November 3, 2015, at which point only a couple of blatant no-hopers had quit that crowded field.

Martin Amis is sure that *Crippled America*, if updated by Trump the nominee, would be dramatically crazier.

And Martin Amis concludes that after a couple of days of pomp and circumstance in the White House, Trump's brain would be nothing more than a bog of testosterone.

Emotionally primitive and intellectually barbaric, the Trump manifesto would be a reasonably good sick joke—if it weren't for one deeply disturbing observation, which occurs on page 163. Every now and again Americans feel the need to exalt and heroize an ignomineus. After Joe the Plumber, here is Don the Realtor—a "very successful" realtor, who, it is superstitiously hoped, can apply the shark-and-vulture practices of big business to the sphere of world statesmanship. I will italicize Trump's key sentence: after he announced his candidacy, "A lot of people tried very hard to paint a bleak picture of what would happen." New paragraph: "*Then the American people spoke.*" We remember the bitter witticism about democracy: "The people have spoken. The bastards."

Who are they? Paradoxically, the constituency of America's foremost Winner is to be found among America's losers. White, heterosexual, and male, they have discovered that the prestige of being white, heterosexual, and male has been inexplicably sapped. At the same time they imagine that their redemption lies with Trump, Inc., which has the obvious credentials ("We manage ice-skating rinks, we produce TV shows, we make leather goods, we create fragrances, and we own beautiful restaurants") to turn it around for the non-rich and the non-educated (as well as for the non-colored, the non-gay, and the non-female).

Telling it like it is? Yes, but telling *what* like *what* is? What he is actually telling us is that the residual Republican hankers for a political contender who knows nothing at all about politics. In 2012, Joe the Plumber, Joe Wurzelbacher, failed to win his race for the Ninth Congressional District in Ohio. In 2016, as I write, Donald Trump has odds of nine to four (and shortening) for the U.S. presidency.

In valediction, two characterological footnotes.

First, Trump and violence. As we know, he has championed mass

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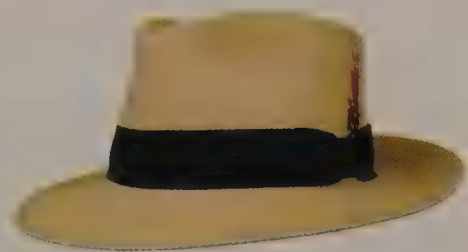
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deportations, torture, and murderous collective punishment; and then there are the bullying incitements at his Nuremberg-like rallies... When did Trump become a fan of the kinetic? There is nothing substantial on this question, or on any other, in *Crippled America*. In *The Art of the Deal* he describes one of his rare interventions in the fine arts: he gave his music teacher a black eye ("because," Trump bafflingly clarifies, "I didn't think he knew anything about music"). But otherwise he comes across as someone naturally averse to the wet stuff of brutality; the chapter-long reminiscence entitled "Growing Up" quite convincingly suggests that it was the father's rough way of doing things (rent collecting in assault conditions) that made the son decide to quit the outer boroughs. I think the taste for violence has come with the taste of real power. It is something new in him—a recent corruption.

Second, the connected topic—Trump and women. This isn't new. This is something old that has recrudesced, an atavism that has "become raw again." This is a wound with the scab off. And now he just can't hold it in, can he, he just can't stop himself—out they come, these smoke signals of aggression. And he is being empirically *stupid*. The question you want to ask Trump is clearly not "If you're so smart, how come you ain't rich?"; it is "If you're so rich, how come you ain't smart?" Has something very grave happened to Trump's I.Q.? He's been worrying about it, too, it seems. Responding on the air to David Cameron's opinion of his ban on Muslims ("stupid, divisive, and wrong"), Trump touchily (and ploddingly) shot back: "Number one, I'm not stupid, okay? I can tell you that right now. Just the opposite." Don't you blush for the lavishness of his insecurity? But Trump is insecurity incarnate—his cornily neon-lit vulgarity (reminding you of the pinups on Lolita's bedroom wall: "Goons in luxurious cars, maroon morons near blueed pools"); his desperate garnering of praise (*Crippled America* quotes encomia from *Travel and Leisure*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *BusinessWeek*, and *Golf Digest*, among many other outlets); his penile pride.

To Democrats at least, "Crossing the Line: How Donald Trump Behaved with Women in Private," the detailed analysis in the *New York*

Times (fifty interviews with "dozens of women"), was a sore disappointment. All we got from it was Miss Utah's "Wow, that's inappropriate" (Donald's introductory kiss on the lips). Trump was born in 1946. Almost every reasonably energetic baby boomer I know, women included, would be utterly destroyed by an equivalent investigation; we behaved far more deplorably than Trump, and managed it without the wealth, the planes and penthouses, the ownership of modeling agencies and beauty pageants. The *Times* piece, in effect, "flipped" the narrative: the story, now, is one of exceptional diffidence—and fastidiousness (obsessive self-cleansing is a trait he twice owns up to in *The Art of the Deal*). A gawker, a groper, and a gloater; but not a lecher. In Trump's *Eros* one detects a strong element of vicariousness. Once again he resembles that Greek antihero: "What you hope/To lay hold of has no existence./Look away and what you love is nowhere" (Ted Hughes, *Tales from Ovid*).

Trump's sexual bashfulness is an interesting surprise. But where, then, does it come from—the rancor, the contempt, the disgust? It is as if he has never been told (a) that women go to the bathroom ("Disgusting," he said of a Clinton toilet break), and (b) that women lactate ("Disgusting," he said of a lawyer who had to go and pump milk for her newborn). Has no one told him (c) that women vote? And I hope he finds that disgusting too, in November. This race will be the mother of a battle of the sexes, Donald against Hillary—and against her innumerable sisters at the ballot box.

Visitors to the United States in an election year are touched by how seriously Americans take their national responsibility, how they vacillate and agonize. They very seldom acknowledge that their responsibility is also global. At an early stage in Trump's rise, his altogether exemplary campaign staff decided that any attempt to "normalize" their candidate would be futile: better, they shruggingly felt (as they deployed the tautologous house style), to "let Trump be Trump." As a lover of America (and as an admirer of the planet), I offer this advice: Don't shrug. Don't stand by and let President Trump be President Trump. ■

GOODBYE TO ALL WHAT?

The return of the Brat Pack

By Michael Wood

Discussed in this essay:

Scream: A Memoir of Glamour and Dysfunction, by Tama Janowitz. Dey Street. 304 pages. \$25.99.

Bright, Precious Days, by Jay McInerney. Knopf. 416 pages. \$28.95.

American Psycho The Musical, book by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, music by Duncan Sheik. Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre.

I paid the bills, bought his ribbons,” we read in a story by Tama Janowitz written in 1979. The narrator is a New York City prostitute, the man in question her pimp, so there is nothing out of line about the financial arrangement. It takes a small act of the historical imagination, though, for today’s reader to understand that the ribbons are not for his hair but for his typewriter.

You’ll have heard of such things, or seen them in old movies. You didn’t have to keep saving your work, but you did have to hit the machine to get it to move down a line. Glanced at now, the instrument becomes a picture of an old world, a marker of lost time. Jay McInerney’s new novel, *Bright, Precious Days*, fondly remembers “a big beige IBM Selectric,” described as “the ultimate writing machine.” But that was then, when his characters had just graduated from Brown, in the early Eighties. A lot of ultimate machines would follow, and many ways in which the machines could talk to one another. Bret Easton Ellis’s most recent novel, *Imperial Bedrooms* (2010), involves internet videos and text-message stalking in significant roles.

These thoughts come to mind because the writers are themselves cur-

Michael Wood is professor emeritus of English and comparative literature at Princeton. He is working on a study of William Empson.



rently taking journeys into the past, or being taken on such journeys. Janowitz is publishing a memoir, *Scream*; McInerney’s new work is full of anxious or sentimental returns to the New York culture of the 1980s; and Ellis’s novel *American Psycho* (1991), having survived an excellent movie adaptation (2000), has become a musical. These core members of the so-called Brat Pack—a name derived immedi-

ately from that given to a cluster of Eighties film actors, and more remotely from the Sinatra–Martin–Davis Rat Pack—all published highly acclaimed works of fiction when they were in their twenties. They portrayed New York as modish, coolly presenting violence, obscenity, and delight in drugs as facts of life that no one else had caught up with. All three are haunting their own beginnings as writers, and the question is not so much where are they now as what were they then? Or perhaps, how do the old days look from the perspective of the new?

A little foggy, is the short answer.

This is partly because so many things have happened since, apart from the technological wonders. We can’t look back beyond them, or imagine a world without them: 9/11, the crash of 2008, the election of Barack Obama, the rise of global terrorism. In the 1980s, many people seem to have thought that they were smart and worldly and living dangerous lives; Patrick Bateman, the man who boasted of his prowess as both an investment banker and a serial killer, said as much in *American Psycho*: “This is no time for the innocent.” Now it looks as if it might have been a time for them more than it was for anyone else, as if there were something safe and charming about the very risks people were taking. This can’t be quite right, since everyone knew about AIDS, and there were many deaths from drug overdoses and drunk driving. But it is one of the effects that the early Brat Pack books create.

A longer answer dissipates some but not all of the fog.

One of Janowitz’s best stylistic tricks is the sped-up hyperbole, where “lots of men,” for example, become “all the men.” In the story “The Slaves in New York,” a woman is thinking of moving to the city. Her plan is to live with a man she doesn’t like and then change her partner when she gets a chance. Her friend, the narrator, the expert on New York City living, discourages her firmly. There will be no such chance. “In today’s world, it’s the

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slave system." A woman can't afford to move out, because she can't afford to live on her own. The friend is still uncertain. "Are you sure there're no available men in New York?" "There're women," the narrator says. "There're hundreds of women. They are out on the prowl. And all the men are gay or are in the slave class themselves." The analogy is outrageous by any standards, quite apart from the drastic simplification. But it is part of the comedy, and the comedy is part of the mangled truth—about women's submission, men's entitlement, high rents, and writers' whining. In another story the same narrator says that her partner is "authoritative and permissive all at the same time. In other words, I can do whatever I want, as long as it's something he approves of."

This is how Janowitz's strongest writing works, in her new memoir as well as in her older fiction. It's not a matter of confusing fact with invention, but of stylization. Facts can be stylized, too. It's perfectly possible that her father and brother are as monolithically awful as she says they are in *Scream*, and her mother as impeccably, sweetly dotty. But the effect is still one of streamlining and shaping, even if life itself is taking care of that.

The same principle allows her new book to be about the mentality of New York City while ostensibly situated in the wilds of New York State. The natives don't see the region as wild, of course, but the writer does, as if she were on a trip to a strange place called America. One of Janowitz's new upstate friends used to live in a place that was "not near any stores and it snowed most of the time, and when it wasn't snowing it flooded." How does Janowitz find her way back to her own remote house? "Simply by remembering the various bathtubs that local residents had discarded along the trail." The men up there are not slaves or slave owners. They are an all but invisible species, "like rare, elusive birds who cannot leave their indigenous habitat.... They don't leave their trucks. Or their barns, or tractors, or recliners."

The tone of the exiled New Yorker works well for the memoir, as does the implication of the writer's stubborn helplessness. This is what I'm like,

Janowitz is saying, and don't you dare give me any advice. She has moved to the wilds to look after her mother, a poet who used to teach at Cornell and now, severely overtaken by dementia, has been migrating from one care facility to another. Janowitz is in the process of having a little house built, but her mother dies before construction is finished. The account of Janowitz's desolation, the shock of the slippage from constant preoccupation to irreparable absence, is genuinely affecting, because, rather than in spite, of its touch of Brat Pack narcissism: "I would never have a mother again."

But curiously, the events of the past, the memory bits of the memoir, fall rather flat. Janowitz mentions her association with the Sex Pistols and Andy Warhol, but assumes that we know all about that stuff. Even when she thinks there is more to say, she doesn't say it. Of Warhol's published diaries, she remarks that they "are not at all what it was like to talk to him or listen to him." This could have been the moment to tell us. She does affirm, a few pages later, that Warhol was not as shallow as he tried to seem. "You could tell he was more complicated than that. Inside there was a suffering, lonely entity." But the word "entity" really does suggest that the writer has turned off her stylistic hearing aid. (Lou Reed fares a little better.)

Generally Janowitz does make an effort to conjure up the 1980s. But she somehow manages not to have been there. "I didn't realize how unique or special the times were that I was living in." And: "There were a lot of fabulous times. Too bad I was afraid to enjoy most of them." She remembers her fellow Pack members, but not too fondly, it seems. "I knew each of my two pack-mates a bit," she says. The next sentence reads, "I did get to meet many interesting people, though."

What is striking, and in its way moving, is Janowitz's assumption that the dead past, once real to her, can only seem improbable to us, a sort of depleted Oz. "Back then," she keeps saying. "See, back then, there were no credit cards"; "people today ... have no idea how limited the lives of women were back then." There were no suitcases with wheels. People did not take snapshots of everything around them.

"New York City just isn't the same." These instances feel like invitations to write, to re-create a world on the page, even if the author seems too tired to act on them. But then she is writing the invitations too, and perhaps feels that time regained would be even worse than time lost.

Lou Reed, a symbol of the cool New York City of the old days, also figures in McNerney's *Bright, Precious Days*. A couple is thinking of moving uptown, or even out of town, or at least the wife is. Eventually they buy a house in Harlem. TriBeCa, she says, is no longer "funky and cheap ... the artists have been replaced by bankers and trust fund brats." "Lou Reed and James Rosenquist still live here," her husband says. He knows, though, that he is losing this battle:

What he wanted to say was that being a resident not only of Manhattan but of downtown was an irreducible core of his identity. He was as much—if not more—a New Yorker as those who found themselves here through the accident of birth.... This was the city he had chosen of all the places in the world; to live anywhere else would feel like exile.

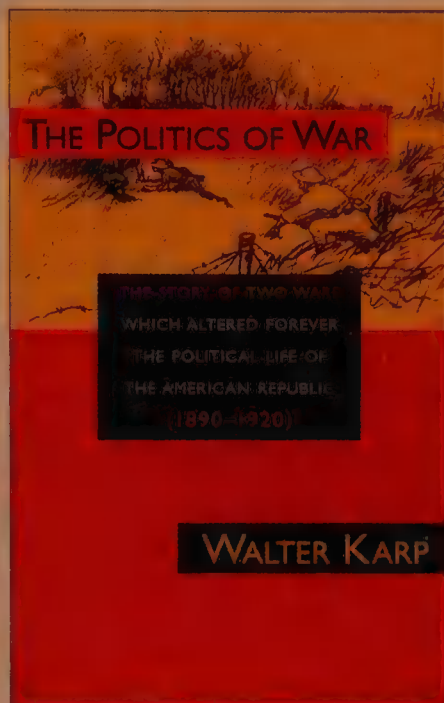
The mockery is sympathetic but it is mockery, and of this crop McNerney is the writer who is funniest and most precise about the view from New York City, that special theory of exceptionalism. Everything outside the city is unreal. Of course, the city and its inhabitants are unreal, too, but they know how unreal they are, and in any case their unreality is much more interesting than anyone else's.

This pattern of thought was already present in the opening pages of *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984). Our hero, who addresses himself and us as "you," is stoned and sad and out of control. "You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning," he says. Translation: This is just the kind of guy you are, but unlike the others, trapped in a dreadfully accurate idea of themselves, you prefer to believe you are someone else, whatever the evidence. Exceptionalism doesn't have to be proved, just doggedly dreamed.

There is pathos, even glamour, in these illusions. It has to be felt in the

Walter Karp

A contributing editor of *Harper's Magazine* for eleven years before his death, Walter Karp was a journalist and political historian whose incisive commentary on government evokes a fierce love of democracy.

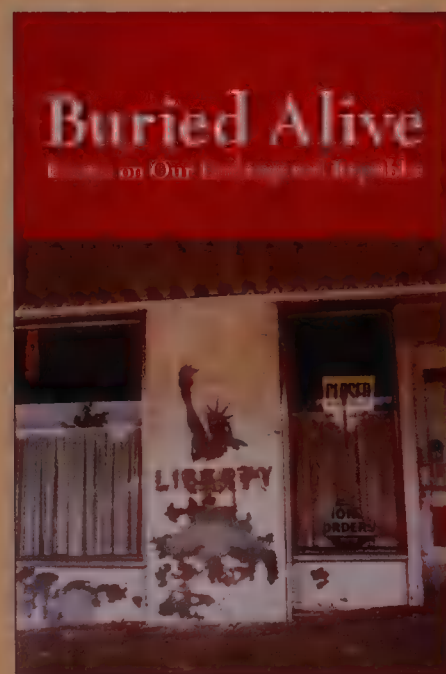


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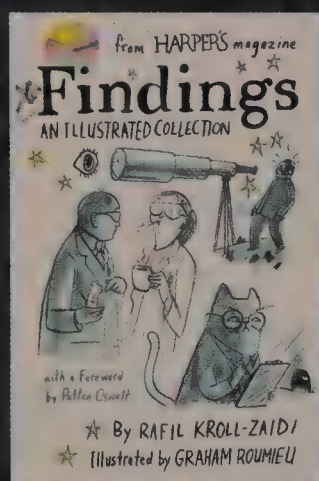
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prose, though, and it is very hard to catch in another medium. This is why the film version of *Bright Lights* (1988) seems so dated and maudlin. The protagonist has lost his job at what but for the laws of libel would be *The New Yorker*, his mother has died, and he can't leave off the cocaine; he has nowhere to go. What we are missing from the novel is his bouncy jokes ("the dawn's surly light"), and sentences like this one:

But what you are left with is a premonition of the way your life will fade behind you, like a book you have read too quickly, leaving a dwindling trail of images and emotions, until all you can remember is a name.

We still catch some self-pity here—the name is Amanda, the wife who has left him—so the general theory circles back to the self. But we can recognize the fading effect even if our companions are still happily with us.

McInerney's readers have already met the TriBeCa couple, in *Brightness Falls* (1992) and *The Good Life* (2007). They are Russell and Corrine Callo-way. He is a publisher who sees himself as a latter-day Max Perkins but may be more of a belated Gordon Lish; she is a former investment banker whose life is vanishing into her charitable work for various expensive organizations on what she thinks of as the "wealthy, skinny island" of Manhattan. The new novel begins around 2006, but soon the last Harry Potter book comes out, the 2008 election arrives, and the stock market crashes. The marriage runs into various kinds of trouble, and so does Russell's career. McInerney's prose in the book as a whole is rather bland, as if steady-state naturalism about these times of ours were more than enough, without any irritable reaching after stylistic excitement. But here, as elsewhere in his writing, there are terrific comic set pieces—in one scene, a drunk and high dinner-party guest kills a pet ferret after mistaking it for a rat, and in another, Russell is chased around Lower Manhattan by a woman he thought he could ask for some literary advice without invoking his old erotic relation with her.

There are elements of Brat Pack branding and competitiveness in the novel. Russell is proud of having had a

table at a Village gastropub "before it became one of the toughest seats in town," and there has been a newfound interest in the Eighties "on the part of those who were too young to have really experienced that decade." This is good news for Russell, since he has just reprinted the books of his old friend Jeff Pierce, who died of AIDS at the height of the crisis. There is even a movie version of one in the works, with Corrine as scriptwriter. But the novel's main discussions of the 1980s resemble the elusive mentions in Janowitz's book. "New York in the Eighties," a young Southern writer says. "That must've been rad." Russell's friend replies, "We didn't know it was the Eighties at the time." Corrine adds, "Let's not get nostalgic for the era of muggings and graffiti and crack vials in the hallway." When a young woman at a gallery opening says, "You guys are so lucky you were around then," Corrine agrees that the Eighties were "memorable"—"Except that, as they say, if you can remember them, then you probably weren't there." And then she reflects but does not report on how frightened she was in those days, her mood caught by one of the most vivid phrases in the novel, "the dread and menace that was the psychic weather of the city back then." Back then: for all the other resemblances of failed or averted recall, this is far from the feeling of dead old worlds that Janowitz conjures up with the same phrase.

You can love the Eighties if you weren't there. If you were there you may have thought there was some sort of magic in the moment, but you just didn't know what it was. Or you may have thought that what others were calling magic was really dread. Perhaps these takes are not so incompatible. All involve ideas of excitement and risk in a different time, its dominant feature being that it is not now, that we can't get there from here.

Will the new musical adaptation of *American Psycho* help us with our thinking? The novel is relentless in its satire, so dogged and detailed in its recording of fashion and food and snobbery that we could be forgiven for thinking of it as a work of manic realism. It's funny but only when we are not reading it, the way some Coen

brothers movies don't start us laughing till we get home. It seems as if no paragraph goes by without informing us what someone is wearing. Patrick Bateman, who can recount bloody crimes and acrobatic sex acts with admirable calm, almost cries because he may not have a reservation at the right restaurant. ("I'm on the verge of tears by the time we arrive at Pastels since I'm positive we won't get seated.") He is not cool enough to keep quiet about his coolness. ("I try to act casual... but I'm smiling proudly.") And in one magnificent passage, a nerdy critical essay on the career of Huey Lewis and the News, we realize that even a professed serial killer can lose himself in the innocence of pedantry. The first album "seems a little too stark, too punk," the second album offers a "surprising, infectious change," the third album is a "flawless masterpiece," and "*Small World* (Chrysalis; 1988) is the most ambitious, artistically satisfying record yet produced" by the band.

We don't get all this commentary in the musical, but we do get the music: Bateman kills his rival, Paul Owen, who has committed the unforgivable offense of mistaking Bateman for someone else, to the rousing tune of "Hip to Be Square." Blood splashes out toward the audience, who are saved from the mess by a convenient clear plastic screen. End of Act I.

Asking how anyone could make a musical out of *American Psycho* is a bit like asking how you solve a problem like Maria. The show opened in London in December 2013, with Matt Smith as Patrick Bateman. The American version premiered in April 2016, with Benjamin Walker in the title role. Bret Easton Ellis attended a preview, and after what a *New York Times* reporter described as a hesitant first response, settled down to enjoy himself and laugh a lot. Critics were divided in both cities, along much the same lines. They thought the show was slick and entertaining or—slick and entertaining. The difference was the value they attached to those words. For *Variety*'s Marilyn Stasio, "The violence is not violent enough." Ben Brantley wrote in the *New York Times*, "This psycho is neither scary nor sexy, nor is the show in which he appears."

I thought the music was pretty tame, both the original 1980s numbers borrowed from Tears for Fears, New Order, the Human League, Phil Collins, and Huey Lewis and the tasteful new material created by Duncan Sheik. Tameness is a liability for a live spectacle (the show ended its Broadway run early, on June 5), but here it's surely part of the point. Patrick Bateman is a very tame fellow—that's why he worries so much about his suits and his aftershave. He was certainly scary in his print and film incarnations, but tame fellows often are. The real fear on offer has to do with the link between the frightened socialite and the bloody murderer. Many people rent horror movies from the video store instead of killing people, but Bateman does both—"thirty, forty, a hundred murders," as he admits to in the confession that ends the story. Or does he?

Mary Harron, the director of the film, said she wanted

to be ambiguous in the way that the book was.... I think it's a failing of mine in the final scene, that I just got the emphasis wrong. I should have left it more open-ended.... It makes it look like it was all in his head, and as far as I'm concerned, it's not.

This is well put. Some of the violence and strange goings-on are in Bateman's head, whatever version we look at. The question is what "all" means. In one scene, for example, an ATM tells Bateman to feed it a stray cat, and he goes on a wild killing spree borrowed straight from a gangster movie. Here's what he says in the book:

I'm having a sort of hard time paying attention because my automated teller has started *speaking* to me, sometimes actually leaving weird messages on the screen, in green lettering, like "Cause a Terrible Scene at Sotheby's" or "Kill the President" or "Feed Me a Stray Cat," and I was freaked out by the park bench that followed me for six blocks last Monday evening and it too spoke to me. Disintegration—I'm taking it in stride.

Even Bateman knows this is "in his head," but what about the rest? If he hasn't committed a hundred murders, does that mean he has committed none?

I don't think Harron failed in her emphasis, but I do think we may worry

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about the wrong things, in the book and the movie and the musical. Is the tale equally scary regardless of whether Bateman has piled up these serial atrocities? If he has, it's scary that he gets away with it, that no one believes he could have committed these crimes. (That is how people routinely talk about serial killers, who are stereotypically the nice guys next door until we learn that they are not.) And if he hasn't, it's scary that a thoroughly conventional, fashion-ridden executive should harbor such a nightmare world in his dreams—all the more so since he is repeatedly seen as indistinguishable from his colleagues. What if they all have such fantasies, and we get to know about Bateman's because this is his story, not theirs?

How have they solved the problem like Maria? Does the 1980s dread and menace that McInerney evokes, and that Janowitz half hints at, survive in the musical? The show looks terrific: all monochrome, glaring lamps, trapdoors, turntables, moving furniture, snappy group dancing. Benjamin Walker manages to appear discreetly and charmingly implausible in whatever role he plays, self-conscious yuppie or screaming axe murderer. This is quite a feat. It's not that he winks at the audience or suggests it's all theater, although that is the effect. He just seems to find all his roles funny.

The show slows down in the second act, and begins to feel like a musical about life in the Hamptons, but the ambiguity of what is really happening is well preserved. It's true that Bateman can't really be prancing around in bloodstained clothes without anybody noticing, but all art forms have their figurative freedoms, and what people will and will not notice is one of this story's great puzzles. Certainly I thought, as the show ended, that Bateman had done much of the killing he claimed to have done, notably of Paul Owen, and that this crime in particular had been covered up by others for reasons of their own, while my wife was sure Bateman had dreamed the whole thing. Two is not a large sample, I know, but it's a start.

All three works—the memoir, the novel, the show—look back at the past with a certain helpless fascination, as if it just will not come into focus. But the musical does something else, because

performers and audience are necessarily living in the present, as readers and writers may or may not be. The great pleasure of the work, as of almost any successful musical, is in what it does with the idea of dance. In this production the actors walk in sync, and when they dance, the stage looks like a well-choreographed gym class (one routine is an actual gym class in the show). These effects don't turn violence and psychosis into fun or fantasy, nor do they help us to explore them as if Gene Kelly were channeling Dostoevsky. They do, however, suggest that even without great music there's a lot to be said for the skillful coordination of human bodies in time, for the contagious sense of energy at work that results from it. Synchronization may be a problem in the mechanical modern world: too many people doing the same thing at the same time. This is what Patrick Bateman represents and imagines he is rebelling against. But onstage he dances with the others, looks for no private beat, and faces the music he can't otherwise bear. ■

August Index Sources

1 American Association of Caregiving Youth (Boca Raton, Fla.); 2 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Atlanta); 3 Gallup (Washington); 4,5 Guttman Institute (N.Y.C.); 6,7 National Center for Education Statistics (Washington); 8 International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (Geneva); 9,10 United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (N.Y.C.); 11,12 U.S. Department of Defense (Arlington, Va.); 13 Europol (The Hague); 14,15 Andreas Glarner (Oberwil-Lieli, Switzerland); 16,17 Amnesty International (London); 18 Prohibition Party (McConnellsburg, Pa.); 19 San Francisco Recreation and Park Department; 20 State Farm Canada (Toronto); 21 Common Sense Media (San Francisco); 22 National Center for Health Statistics (Hyattsville, Md.); 23 Louisiana State Legislature (Baton Rouge); 24 United Gun Group (Kansas City, Mo.); 25,26 Kaiser Family Foundation (Menlo Park, Calif.); 27 Juvenile Justice GPS (Pittsburgh); 28 Center for Community Alternatives (Syracuse, N.Y.); 29 U.S. Government Accountability Office (Boston); 30 U.S. Department of Education; 31 McKinney Independent School District (Tex.); 32 North Dakota Office of State Tax Commissioner (Bismarck); 33 U.S. Energy Information Administration; 34,35 World Health Organization (Geneva); 36 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 37,38 International Olympic Committee (Lausanne, Switzerland); 39 Lollipop (London).

PUZZLE

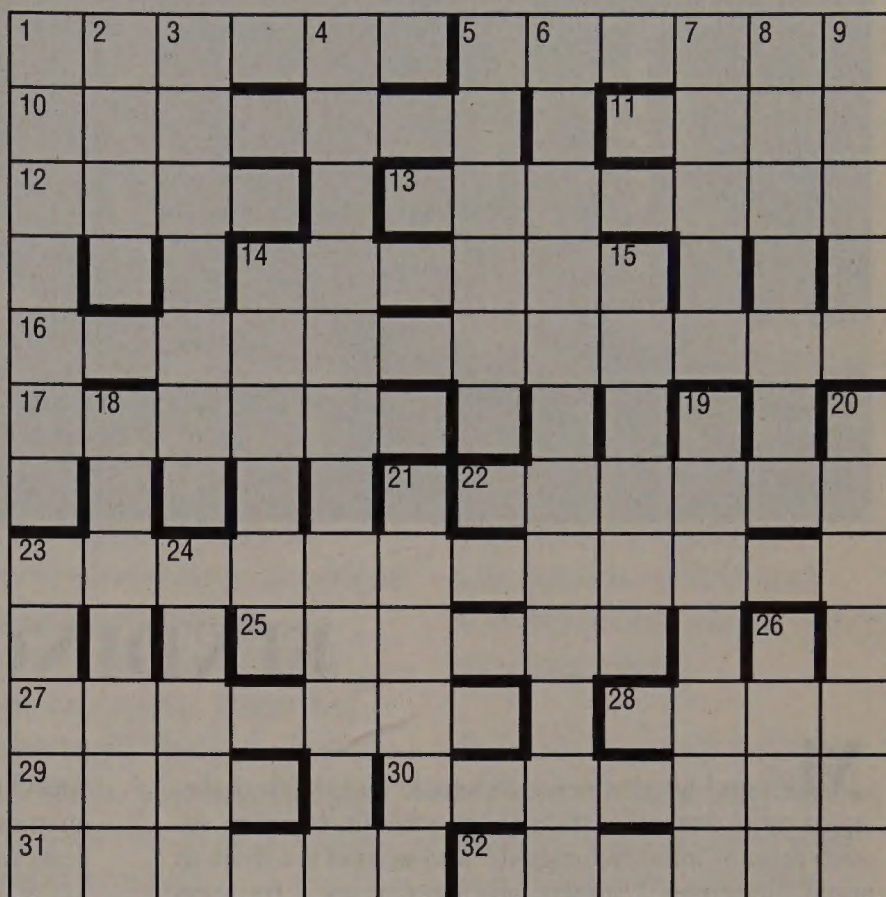
SIXES AND SEVENS

By Richard E. Maltby Jr.

(with acknowledgments to Zander of The Listener)

The clues to words of six and seven letters are grouped separately. Solvers must determine where each answer belongs in the diagram, using answers to the numbered clues as a guide.

Answers include six proper nouns, one of which is a foreign word. Among the six-letter words, the last is uncommon. As always, mental repunctuation of a clue is the key to its solution. The solution to last month's puzzle appears on page 86.



ACROSS

11. Island qualified for a return visit (4)
12. Prosecute common writing being deleted, and winning (4)
16. Pop quiz, I'd learnt, leaves us put out (12)
23. Argonauts animated with CGI getting to look better than reality (12)
28. Tweets back during a short drive (4)
29. Cripples miss the first targets (4)

DOWN

2. Cellule's structure starts a month back (4)
4. The rear of the Deer House at the zoo? (12)
6. Adventurous, careless camper would not want to leave this behind! (12)
7. Mention conspiracies to Jews, have an attack (5)
9. Crying, bust out from a center (5)
23. Place, dates, travels (5)
24. Family member to bump into family doctor outside (5)
26. Landing promotional representation that is included (4)

SIX-LETTER WORDS

- a. Wanting something from Oscar ceremony
- b. I'd help digging up an archaeological site
- c. Cut the head off fruit, get more fruit

- d. I'll go over a letter if there's mutual dissatisfaction
- e. Lassies take part—the rest is obvious!
- f. Result uncertain? You're putting me on!
- g. Science is never-ending, mutable, and beautiful
- h. Speedo worn to make a statement
- i. Lines within lines: Tanzania
- j. Description of a knockout is, up-front, spot-on
- k. Mental state produced by bad translation of Proust?
- l. Nest, for example, grey but obscured

SEVEN-LETTER WORDS

- a. Secretly starting to drink too much, put a drop here and there
- b. A heart for one day—disheartening material
- c. Dirty delivery room is one!
- d. Besmirch, traduce, a place where Lincoln practiced
- e. Everyone very on, turning into great mess—it's a case for showing off
- f. The patch of sky—odds are there's something brewing in it (3,4)
- g. Permit that leads to a dance—you have to do it again (3,4)
- h. Minidisc and LED screens checked eggs for freshness
- i. Lost initially during Ice Age, sadly mournful
- j. Cop who is up for love in a crazy minute

Contest Rules: Send completed diagram with name and address to "Sixes and Sevens," *Harper's Magazine*, 666 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. If you already subscribe to *Harper's*, please include a copy of your latest mailing label. Entries must be received by August 5. The sender of the first correct solution opened at random will receive a one-year subscription to *Harper's Magazine* (limit one winner per household per year). The winner's name will be printed in the October issue. The winner of the June puzzle, "Missing Links," is Dana Bisbee, Charlestown, Mass.



FINDINGS

Men and women perceive female faces with makeup as more attractive than those without, but men see such faces as more “prestigious” and women see them as more “dominant.” Singers who employ vocal fry seem more expressive if they are female and less expressive if they are male. Straight men evaluating the pain of another man will rate it lower if he has an attractive female partner. Australian teenage boys whose empathy is one standard deviation above average have nearly twice as many female friends as boys whose empathy is one standard deviation below, and a study of ninth graders found that opposite-gender friends are unlikely to date. Researchers found that young, educated, neurotic women are particularly likely to report aversion to the word “moist.” However, “moist”-averse subjects are no likelier than other subjects to condemn consensual incest, and all study participants rate “moist” more negatively when it follows “fuck” and “pussy” or “paradise” and “heaven,” and more positively when it follows “cake” and “delicious” or “nigger” and “retarded.” Psychologists described the case of a brain-damaged Italian man who compulsively speaks bad French and bakes excessive amounts of bread.

Breast milk thwarts infant diarrhea. Babies who lead their own weaning are likeliest to choke on apples, raw vegetables, and dried fruit, whereas spoon-fed babies are likeliest to choke on corn, crackers, meat, and rusks. Chinese children, as they mature, more closely associate facial attractiveness with trustworthiness. Experienced mother pandas spend more time grooming and nursing their cubs, who also whine less. Bears exhibit lower self-esteem, higher BMI, and riskier sexual behavior than other gay men. A *Homo rhodesiensis* femur was

found to have been gnawed by a hyena. A study of 954 mammal species established that penis bones evolved at least nine times and disappeared at least ten. An analysis of Kinsey data collected between 1938 and 1961 found that boys rated their first postpubertal same-sex experience just as positively regardless of whether it was with another adolescent or with an adult man. Adults with Williams syndrome are at risk of immediately seeking to meet new online “friends” in person. At the Mayo Clinic between 1995 and 2015, hypersexuality, nose-picking, dementia, and eating the cotton from one’s Depends were noted among coprophagists.

Herpes may cause constipation.

Perch larvae exposed to high concentrations of polystyrene come to prefer eating plastic. Invasive aquatic hydrilla weed dumped from home aquariums into Florida waterways is being eaten by large invasive apple snails, who are then eaten by snail kites, who go insane. Electric eels will, as Alexander von Humboldt reported, leap from the water to administer shocks. An expert tree climber with a measuring tape climbed to the top of a yellow meranti that is now the tallest known tree in the tropics and texted, “I don’t have time to take photos using a good camera because there’s an eagle around that keeps trying to attack me and also lots of bees.” Fat air passengers are treated most kindly by female African-American flight attendants. French doctors proposed that anorexia nervosa is less about the fear of getting fat than about the pleasure of getting thin. In Germany, certain psychopaths are beneficial for the workplace. Crowd-sourcing brain-wave data may make it possible to predict seizures in dogs. Psychologists unveiled the Mind Excessively Wandering Scale. ■

French River, a painting by Kim Dorland. Courtesy the artist and Angell Gallery, Toronto.
Dorland’s work is on view this month at Mier Gallery, in Los Angeles.

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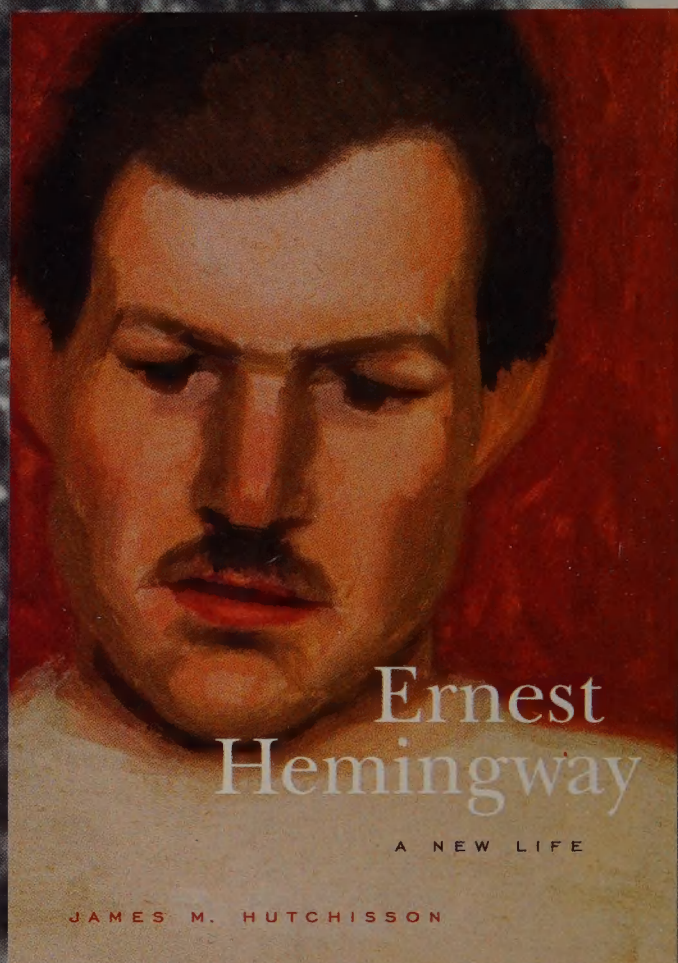
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